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Class, Nation and Localism in the Northumberland Art
World, 1820-1939'

Rachel Mumba

PhD Thesis

12/01/2008



- 2 APR 2008

The Emergence of Cultural Homogenization or the Survival of Localism? National Identity, Centralization and Class Behaviour in the Northumberland Art Scene, c. 1820-1939.

This study examines county identity in the art culture of Britain between c.1820 and 1939. In doing so it tests the validity of the prevailing historiography of culture. This historiography emphasizes the growth of the state, homogenization of class identity and the importance of 'Britishness'. This thesis examines the historiography in relation to the artistic community of Northumberland between the establishment of the Northumberland Institution for the Promotion of the Fine Arts in 1822 and the Second World War.

It argues that county identity, its forms and its survival, were as much due to internal factors as nationwide trends. It also asserts that much of the relevant historiography needs to be adapted to take into account the continuing strength of county identity and needs to see this county identity as often being as important as class in all areas of the art world. Furthermore, it demonstrates that the progression towards a 'nationalization of culture' was not always smooth or one way and that the idea of a growth in 'Englishness' and class identity needs to be reviewed.

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Abbreviations

DUL	Durham University Library
GHA	George Horton Archive
LPS	Literary and Philosophical Society
NAL	National Art Library
NCL	Newcastle Central Library
NUL	Newcastle University Library
RHA	Ralph Hedley Archive
RHL	Ralph Hedley (Craftsman) Limited Collection
TP	Trevelyan Papers
TWCMS	Tyne and Wear County Museum Service
TWAS	Tyne and Wear Archive Service
UBC	University of British Columbia

Introduction

Research Objectives

This interdisciplinary study will explore the nature and strength of local-regional or county- identity in the art and culture of nineteenth-century Britain. It will examine the validity of current historiography of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century culture, by testing that historiography against the experience of Northumberland's artistic community between c.1820-1939. The established historical framework through which to study the cultural developments of the period emphasizes the roles of national identity, the growth of state involvement in culture and middle-class identity in framing artistic culture. According to these views, there was an increasing interest in the idea of 'Englishness', which grew to its apogee in the early twentieth century, artistic education became more standardized and the middle class increasingly shared the same artistic and cultural experiences. This historiography will be studied in relation to the artistic community of Northumberland between the establishment of the county's first major art society, the Northumberland Institution for the Promotion of the Fine Arts in 1822 and the outbreak of the Second World War, which obviously drastically changed the cultural scene across Britain.

It will demonstrate that much of the current historiography needs modification to take into account the resilience of local identity, which could be as important as class in artistic production, display and the art market. It will also demonstrate that there was not always a linear progression towards a 'nationalization of culture', through a growth in 'Englishness', the state and class identity. Indeed, one can see in this study that there was a greater local identity amongst artists in the 1890s than in the 1820s and that this was at least partly due to the role played by the Government School of Design in the area. Furthermore, a more potent ingredient in artistic relations, than class relations, was the relationship between artist and members of an 'artistic elite', such as patrons. ¹

¹ See p. 14 for a definition.

Historiographical Review

The dominant historiography states three important propositions about late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century artistic and culture developments. Firstly, that this was a period that saw the creation of a national artistic identity. Secondly, that the state played an increasing role in fostering artistic culture. Thirdly, that a middle-class identity became more important in patterns of artistic production, patronage, consumption and exhibition and that this identity became increasingly standardized across the country. All of these propositions lead to, and come from, the idea that, in cultural terms, the nation was becoming smaller and more uniform as the period progressed. This fundamental idea is found in the works of historians such as Trevor Fawcett, whose work on the regional art worlds is still regarded as a key text by art historians. Fawcett begins his study of provincial art between 1800-1830, by asserting that in 1800 'as few as twenty percent of the population of distant parts of the country ever travelled to London more than once or twice in their lives,' and there were no provincial art institutions. ² By the end of the period Fawcett is not only stressing that 'nowhere was in complete artistic isolation' but that 'there was more homogeneity than might be supposed'. ³

The secondary proposition regarding the development of a national artistic identity is reflected in *The Geographies of Englishness*. ⁴ This work studies the search for English artistic and cultural identity, in the Victorian period, when, according to David Corbett, 'ideas of nationhood and national identity were especially important in England' ⁵ and therefore 'calls for a distinctly English art' ⁶ emerged. There are arguments between historians as to when this sense of a 'national identity' arose and what form it took. Gerald Newman and Kathleen Wilson, amongst others, see the seeds of 'Englishness' as being sown in the late eighteenth century, as a symptom of modernity. ⁷ Stephanie Barczewski and Krishan Kumar see the growth of a narrow 'English', as opposed to 'British' identity, in the late nineteenth century. According to

² Trevor Fawcett, *The Rise of English Provincial Art: Artists, Patrons, and Institutions outside London, 1800-1830* (Oxford, 1974), p. 10.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 214.

⁴ David Peters Corbett, Ysanne Holt and Fiona Russell (eds.), *The Geographies of Englishness: Landscape and the National Past 1880-1940* (New Haven, 2002).

⁵ Corbett, *Geographies of Englishness*, p. xvii.

⁶ *Idem.*

⁷ Gerald Newman, *The Rise of English Nationalism: A Cultural History 1740-1830* (London, 1987); Kathleen Wilson, *The Island Race: Englishness, Empire and Gender in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 2002).

them, this was fuelled, in part, by a loss in that confidence in Empire which allowed Birmingham 'provincialism' to have a 'metropolitan dimension' through its newspapers, novels and museums.⁸ As Barczewski notes of the contemporary attitude, 'a Briton could be made, one had to be born English'.⁹

The image which was most commonly appropriated for the proper expression of 'Englishness' included 'revulsion from modern life and its symbols',¹⁰ and concentrated on 'the south country'.¹¹ In regards to the north, it was 'imagined as entirely overrun by industrialization and consequently ceased to be available as a representative image'¹² either of Englishness or Britishness to metropolitan artists. Representative spaces for national identity therefore 'shrank to southern sites and to isolated, supposedly more authentic, locations like Cornwall'.¹³ Nevertheless, these images were 'mediated through metropolitan ideals, just as ... artists ... remained tied to metropolitan exhibiting societies, critics and spectators'.¹⁴ Within this framework, many late nineteenth century artists became preoccupied with representing idealized peasants and fishermen, made to fit not only class, but national stereotypes; and as Nina Lübbren points out, this phenomenon can be seen across Europe in this period.¹⁵

The negotiation of Englishness, according to this framework, therefore ignores the north and the industrial. Just as the metropolis set the agenda for the nationwide depictions of landscape, so, the paintings displayed in London have often been used by historians as the chief evidence base from which such developments are examined. This is seen in works such as Peter Howard *Landscapes: The Artists' Vision* (1991). Howard attempts to delineate the changes in landscape tastes by examining the pictures displayed in the Royal Academy's summer exhibitions. Because he uses only metropolitan exhibitions it is not surprising to see

⁸ Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Colony and the Metropole in the English Imagination, 1830-1867* (Chicago, 2002), p. 289.

⁹ Stephanie L. Barczewski, *Myth and National Identity in Nineteenth-Century Britain: The Legends of King Arthur and Robin Hood* (Oxford, 2000), p. 6.

¹⁰ Idem.

¹¹ Krishan Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 211.

¹² Corbett, *Geographies of Englishness*, p. xi.

¹³ Idem. There were rural and coastal artists' colonies and groups in the north-east region as well however. See Laura Newton, *Cullercoats: A North-East Colony of Artists* (Bristol, 2003); Nina Lübbren "'Toilers of the Sea', Fisherfolk and the Geographies of Tourism in England, 1880-1900' in Corbett, *Geographies of Englishness*.

¹⁴ Corbett, *Geographies of Englishness*, p. xi.

¹⁵ Nina Lübbren, *Rural Artists' Colonies in Europe 1870-1910* (Manchester, 2001).

that depictions of the northern counties are less represented than those of the south east. Therefore, it maybe as much a methodological preference as an historical process, that has led to the north being little regarded in the study of the development of 'Englishness'.

Little has been written about how the northern communities responded to these developments from those who research the growth of national identity. Therefore, it is difficult to assess whether they see the northern communities as having developed their own ideas of Englishness, whether they believed them to be preoccupied with the development of other identities, or as having simply reflected, in their exhibitions and art work, the developments which were taking place in and through the metropolis, whilst being excluded from actively participating in the debate.

The second proposition is exemplified by Janet Minihan's work on cultural-artistic development in the period, namely that there was a 'development of governmental support for the arts',¹⁶ which often, as is mentioned in Alison Smith's work, strengthened a specifically English artistic identity, for example in The Tate-'the British Luxembourg'.¹⁷ Minihan notes that the 14 branch schools of the Government School of Design were located 'primarily in the industrial communities' of the north and Scotland.¹⁸ She also notes that, through their establishment, 'art ... was a little more popular and a little less aristocratic as a result',¹⁹ despite the fact that 'some people clung on to the arts as the last prop of an allegedly embattled upper-class culture'.²⁰ For her, nineteenth-century artistic culture became more 'popular', as it became more accessible to people of all social classes. In such a framework 'the north' was synonymous with industry and as such was largely a passive receiver of culture. As Krishan Kumar notes, 'the "south country" ... was also the region of some of the grandest estates ... it had ... an unmistakably class character. It [English nationalism] ignored the industrial cities and conurbations of the midlands and the North with their large working-class

¹⁶ Janet Minihan, *Nationalization of Culture: The Development of State Subsidies to the Arts in Great Britain* (London, 1977), p. x.

¹⁷ Alison Smith, 'A "State" Gallery? The Management of British Art during the Early Years of the Tate' in Paul Barlow and Colin Trodd (eds.), *Governing Cultures: The Art Institution in Victorian London* (Aldershot, 2000). In 1818 the Musée du Luxembourg became the first state art gallery in Europe.

¹⁸ Minihan, *Nationalization of Culture*, p. 50.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. x.

populations'.²¹ This assumption maybe the reason that the art colony at Cullercoats has been ignored by the 'ever growing body of literature' on the coastal colonies, because, as Laura Newton points out, 'the understanding of the north east in mainly industrial terms contributed to [its] marginalisation' from the early twentieth century.²²

Although by labelling the north as 'passive' in cultural production, Minihan uses the language of class to define northern culture, she does not ignore the role of the northern middle class in the dissemination of culture emanating from the capital; noting that this group was important in running the Schools of Design. Here, she is close to writers such as Dianne Macleod, who emphasizes the 'acculturating' role of middle-class milieus in places such as Newcastle and Leeds, and indeed, linking the pace of this process to the industrial acquisitions of the philanthropists and art collectors involved. This historiographical trend sees the production, acquisition and dissemination of art in class terms. This is the most prevalent view of artistic culture in the period and is largely based upon the ideas of Pierre Bourdieu and to a lesser extent on Michel Foucault's analysis of the close relationship between expert knowledge and power.²³ It developed in the writings of Janet Wolff and John Seed, Caroline Arscott, Michael Harrison and Shelagh Wilson.

Arscott, Harrison and Wilson have expanded upon the idea of artistic culture as expression of class in their analyses of middle-class artistic philanthropy, despite the fact that Wilson notes that the Victorian conception of culture was much less class-based. Wilson notes that 'the leaders in the philanthropic art movement considered them [the working class] an empty vessel to be filled with either art and enlightenment or drink and depravity'²⁴ and that institutions such as the Whitechapel Art Gallery were seen as important places in which to instil the former. However, as Martin Hewitt and Peter Bailey note,

²¹ Kumar, *Making of English National Identity*, p. 211.

²² Newton, *Cullercoats*, p. 11.

²³ For example Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (Cambridge, Mass., 1984); Pierre Bourdieu and Alain Darbel et al., *The Love of Art: European Art Museums and their Public* (California, 1990 [1966]); Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Writings, 1972-1977* (London, 1980).

²⁴ Shelagh Wilson, "'The Highest Art for the Lowest People': the Whitechapel and other Philanthropic Art Galleries, 1877-1901' in Barlow and Todd, *Governing Cultures*, p.p. 172-3.

this attempt to control through cultural institutions did not always work.²⁵ Harrison notes that the Manchester Art Museum 'was a site of middle-class dominance'²⁶ and Arscott goes further to suggest that the initiatives such as the Leeds Polytechnic Exhibitions of 1839 to 1845 'reveal a conscious effort to set up mechanisms to provide class cohesion for the bourgeoisie'.²⁷

Furthermore, there is the assumption that there was an increasingly uniform middle and working class in the period, assisted by developing transport, economic and social links.²⁸ Robert Gray illustrates one facet of this development of the middle class in his study of professionals. He describes them as "modernising" cultural brokers between localities and wider networks'.²⁹ For many commentators this process was accompanied by the increasing centrality of London. Alan Kidd and David Nicholls note that the most important feature of this paradigm, according to many historians, was 'the subordination of the industrial middle class to a metropolitan-centred ... social formation',³⁰ although, as Richard Trainor notes, 'it is vital to avoid projecting back onto the period before 1939 the geographical hierarchies of the United Kingdom at the end of the twentieth century'.³¹ Importantly for this study, there is disagreement over whether it was the power or the weakness of 'provincial' networks that led to the 'nationalization' of the middle class. For historians such as W.D. Rubinstein the zenith of this process occurred during the inter-war period, in a generation which saw the 'collapse of provincial elites' as well as the growth of 'public

²⁵ Martin Hewitt, 'Confronting the Modern City: the Manchester Free Public Library, 1850-80', *Urban History* 27 (2000); Peter Bailey, 'Will the Real Bill Banks Please Stand Up? Towards a Role Analysis of Mid-Victorian Working-Class Respectability', *Journal of Social History* 17 (1978-1979).

²⁶ Michael Harrison, 'Art and Philanthropy: T.C. Horsfall and The Manchester Art Museum' in Alan Kidd and K.W. Roberts (eds.), *City, Class and Culture: Studies of Social Policy and Cultural Production in Victorian Manchester* (Manchester, 1985), p. 121.

²⁷ Caroline Arscott, 'Without Distinction of Party': The Polytechnic Exhibitions in Leeds 1839-45' in Janet Wolff and John Seed (eds.), *The Culture of Capital: Art, Power and the Nineteenth-Century Middle Class* (Manchester 1988), p. 155.

²⁸ Some historians have questioned the integration thesis and have highlighted the importance of local identity and xenophobia as barriers to such integration. See K.D.M. Snell, 'The Culture of Local Xenophobia', *Social History* 28 (2003) for his discussion of identity amongst the rural working class in the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

²⁹ Robert Gray, 'The Platform and the Pulpit: Cultural Networks and Civic Identities in Industrial Towns c. 1850-1870', in Alan Kidd and David Nicholls (eds.), *The Making of the British Middle Class? Studies in Regional and Cultural Diversity since the Eighteenth Century* (Gloucestershire, 1998), p. 131.

³⁰ Kidd and Nicholls, *Making of the British Middle Class?*, p. xv.

³¹ Richard Trainor, 'Neither Metropolitan nor Provincial: The Interwar Middle Class', in Kidd and Nicholls, *The Making of the British Middle Class?*, p. 204.

schools and universities'.³² However, Trainor argues that there were 'decreasingly unequal provincial-metropolitan relations'³³ up to 1914 and that as the provincial middle class grew in strength it could meet on equal terms with the middle class of London and the south east, to produce a 'nationalised' middle-class identity, not based on metropolitan dominance. For Wilson, by the beginning of the twentieth century, the working class had however developed their own 'independent popular culture', which meant that the 'Hollywood, rather than the ale house, was to be [the galleries'] real rival'.³⁴

This class analysis does not always fit with the emphasis placed on the role of state patronage as artistic engine, but neither does it find a natural home with the ideas embodied in *The Geographies of Englishness*, where it is nationality and not class, which is the dominant identity. However, this view is not contradictory. It is founded upon the notion that 'the commonality of aesthetic experience was a central element of middle-class culture'.³⁵ As such, all these propositions share two important beliefs in the search for 'Englishness', as it has been constructed and the growth of state power, London is at the centre of cultural developments. The class analysis does not necessarily make the same case for the centrality of the capital, but even when this is not the case it amounts only to a difference in emphasis, because, as Anna Robins puts it, it was 'the English middle classes, who were making the English countryside their own'- not the London-based artists and critics, but their audiences.³⁶ Similarly, the class analysis, because it sees artistic culture as power, does apply a 'top-down' approach, which is similar to the idea of artistic culture implicit in works which emphasize the growth of the state.

Within this historiography there is little room for the idea of a county or regional culture, which neither places London nor representatives of a middle class at its centre. Indeed, some of the older historiography denied that there was any artistic culture in the north, characterizing the area as philistine. Quentin Bell, for

³² W. D. Rubinstein, 'Britain's Élite in the Inter-War Period, 1918-39', in Kidd and Nicholls, *The Making of the British Middle Class?*, p. 198.

³³ Trainor, 'Neither Metropolitan nor Provincial', p. 205.

³⁴ Wilson, 'The Highest Art', p. 184.

³⁵ Dianne Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class: Money and the Making of Cultural Identity* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 15. Here, culture is explained as having 'lost its eighteenth century elitist connotations'.

³⁶ Anna Gruetzner Robins, 'Living the Simple Life: George Clausen at Chidwick Green, St Albans' in Corbett, *The Geographies of Englishness*, p. 21.

example, attributed the success of the Pre-Raphaelites in the north to the fact that the provincial patrons wished to purchase art that 'took [them] from the mills and mines of the north'.³⁷ Similarly, Arscoff concedes, in her study of the Leeds Polytechnic Exhibitions, that 'there is a common assumption that members of bourgeoisie in the northern towns were inactive in cultural pursuits'.³⁸

Although the current historiography plays down the accusation of philistinism, much of the literature implies that as national and class identity grew, along with the state, there must have been a concurrent decline in regionally-specific artistic identity. Therefore, a lot of the research into art in the north east has tried to contextualize it into narratives of class or national identity.³⁹ Nina Lübbren's research into Cullercoats is concerned with the 'bourgeois myth of fisher folk as constructed and propagated through images'.⁴⁰ Lübbren wonders whether British artists' focus on the heroism of the fishing communities they depicted, could be linked with ideas of British nationhood, 'connected with a particular relationship with the sea'.⁴¹ Consequently, her research is on many different fishing villages in Britain not only Cullercoats but also St Ives, Newlyn and Staithes amongst others. According to Lübbren, the reality of fishing life was ignored in favour of the 'place-myth', constructed in the metropolis.⁴²

Similarly, Macleod's study of patronage in Newcastle is a study of how the economic shapes the cultural and the purposes of culture for the English elite. She states that the city was 'a late arrival at the cultural feast enjoyed by other provincial centres' because 'the ... city's moneyed middle class postponed its patronage until the region's prosperity was assured'.⁴³ Here, the cultural agents are those 'most committed

³⁷ Quentin Bell, *Victorian Artists* (London, 1967), p. 15.

³⁸ Arscoff, 'Without Distinction of Party', p. 135.

³⁹ No attempt has been made to explicitly draw the experience of Newcastle's Government School of Design into a larger narrative on state expansion in the arts, as little has been written on this institution. There is one article: Quentin Bell, 'The School of Design, Newcastle', *Durham Research Review* 29 (1958). This article focuses on the work of William Bell Scott. Bell cites the following reference: Vera Smith 'Some Antecedents of the Department of Fine Art, Newcastle upon Tyne', *Durham University Journal* 25 However, this citation is incorrect, the article can actually be found in *Durham University Journal* 45 (1953).

⁴⁰ Lübbren, '“Toilers of the Sea”', p. 29.

⁴¹ Lübbren, '“Toilers of the Sea”', p. 41.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 44.

⁴³ Dianne Macleod, 'Private and Public Patronage Victorian Newcastle', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 52 (1989), p. 188.

to the economic development of the north east'⁴⁴ and although these 'middle-class'⁴⁵ men were in unusual economic situations, as soon as the circumstances allowed, they behaved as did their contemporaries in other regions.

Some historians have developed the idea that regional centres were, in part, motivated to artistic activity through regional or city pride. Fawcett notes in his work on the provincial art scenes of the early nineteenth century that: 'industrial centres of the North ... proposed ... to break or at least mitigate ... their cultural dependence on London',⁴⁶ also, 'a town's local pride was stung when a comparable place boasted of its exhibition'.⁴⁷ Similarly, Paul Quinn's work on the Newcastle exhibitions between 1822 and 1840 suggests that institutions such as the Northern Academy were 'placed in a direct relation to national culture'⁴⁸ by their founders and supporters whilst asserting that the 'local Academy ... [was] envisaged as an equal player in ... cultural production'.⁴⁹

Recently, some regional historians have gone further and attempted to claim 'northernness' for the nineteenth-century art world of Northumberland. Paul Usherwood, in his article on the work of William Bell Scott (1811-1890) notes: '*Iron and Coal* ... despite its North-East subject and location is always discussed within a metropolitan historical framework. As a result, its complexity of meaning and its part in the production of ideas of "northernness" is never acknowledged'.⁵⁰ He notes that previous attempts to understand the painting reveal 'a form of hegemonic power inscribed in modern historical writing' that emanates from 'the south'⁵¹ and which classifies the painting either as a symbol of the Industrial Revolution or modern urban life, ignoring its sense of place.⁵² What Usherwood is concerned with is the painting's meaning for those viewing it at the Hare's Gallery in Newcastle, where 'the values and concerns

⁴⁴ Macleod, 'Private and Public Patronage', p. 188.

⁴⁵ Idem.

⁴⁶ Fawcett, *Rise of English Provincial Art*, p. 9.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 10.

⁴⁸ Paul Quinn, 'Picturing Locality: Art and Regional Identity in the North East of England', unpubl. PhD thesis, University of Sunderland, 1997, p. 107.

⁴⁹ Quinn, 'Picturing Locality', p. 108.

⁵⁰ Paul Usherwood, 'William Bell Scott's *Iron and Coal*: Northern Readings' in Laing Art Gallery *Pre-Raphaelites: Painters and Patrons in the North-East* (Newcastle, 1996), p. 39.

⁵¹ Idem.

⁵² One such reading can be seen in Linda Nochlin's work. She asserts that the painting described 'the heroic side of modern life': Linda Nochlin, *Realism* (London, 1971), p. 179.

of a local ... audience came into play'.⁵³ For the local audience, Usherwood concludes, this painting was a celebration of 'the town's new found industrial strength ... part of a discourse on civic pride'.⁵⁴ Indeed, for Usherwood, this industrialism gave Novocastrians a sense of themselves. Similarly for Usherwood it also gave them an inclusive view of their community, in which they believed 'classes [were] able to work together in harmony for the greater good'.⁵⁵

Historians such as Macleod agree that this painting is a 'record of Newcastle's transition from provincial town to international centre'.⁵⁶ However, for her what makes the painting 'such a compelling icon of its age'⁵⁷ is its attempt to make a Pre-Raphaelite subject of industry and the way it revealed that industrial wealth was what 'fuelled Victorian Newcastle's cultural machine'.⁵⁸ Proving that, for Macleod, symbolically, 'a ... bond between fine art and industrial products'⁵⁹ could exist for the middle class of such northern towns.

Paul Quinn's work on Thomas Bewick also attempts to claim some 'northernness' for a north-eastern 'icon', by showing how later Northumberland artists and writers have viewed him as 'their strongest pine'.⁶⁰ For example, he notes that Julia Boyd's *Bewick Gleanings* (1886) 'embroiders on the connection of Bewick to his locality'⁶¹ by emphasizing his 'descent from the northern yeomanry, a race'⁶² and being 'careful to show that any worldliness, pride, or self-assertion ... was actually a result of the natural characteristics displayed by the people of the north'.⁶³ Quinn believes there was a willingness to recreate Bewick as a regional hero because, in the last two decades of the century, when the regional economy was strong,

⁵³ Usherwood, 'William Bell Scott's *Iron and Coal*', p. 40.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁵⁶ Macleod, 'Private and Public Patronage', p. 190.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 191.

⁵⁸ *Idem.*

⁵⁹ Macleod, 'Private and Public Patronage', p. 194.

⁶⁰ Paul Quinn, "'Their Strongest Pine': Thomas Bewick and Regional Identity in the Late Nineteenth Century Bewick' in Bewick Society, *Bewick Studies, Essays in Celebration of the 250th Anniversary of the Birth of Thomas Bewick 1753-1828* (Northumberland, 2003), p. 111.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

⁶² Julia Boyd, *Bewick Gleanings* (Newcastle, 1886), p. 1 quoted in Quinn, 'Their Strongest Pine', p. 116.

⁶³ Quinn, 'Their Strongest Pine', p. 117.

'attempts had been made to identify a regional art'⁶⁴ and to cast the local artist as an 'artist-seer ... amongst his people ... withdrawn for the centre of society'.⁶⁵ These artists became 'the means by which regional specificity [was] marked off, displayed and strengthened'.⁶⁶

Laura Newton stresses that the work of the Cullercoats colony was different to that of the other colonies. She asserts that unlike Cornwall or Newlyn, which were depicted by London artists 'as a site of "difference"',⁶⁷ the artists at Cullercoats were atypically local, and were producing work for a local audience. Therefore, contrary to Lübbren's idea of place myths, these works were 'a coherent and particular image of a northern locality'.⁶⁸ 'Part of a regional attempt to foster a "northern" identity and culture',⁶⁹ in opposition to the industrial image by which the region was depicted outside, one which fitted in with the preoccupations of local notables such as Robert Spence Watson and Richard Welford. However, Newton confines the findings of her analysis to the end of the nineteenth century, after which she states 'the heyday of provincial art communities was over'.⁷⁰

Although Newton forces into the foreground the issue of north-east identity in Northumberland's artistic culture, she does not deny the role of class analysis in the understanding of regional patronage. For Newton, although the Cullercoats colony 'nurtured a socially diverse patronage base'⁷¹ the local public's buying patterns 'reflect a national shift in patronage trends and cultural hegemony'⁷² which 'reflected a larger desire to cultivate a distinctive bourgeoisie aesthetic',⁷³ which 'favoured "established" contemporary painters'.⁷⁴ Newton agrees with Arscott, when she notes, 'the establishment of a middle-class cultural dominance [helped] to educate and integrate the working class into the cultural hegemony of

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 120.

⁶⁵ Idem.

⁶⁶ Idem.

⁶⁷ Newton, *Cullercoats*, p. 36.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 34.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 35.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 62.

⁷¹ Idem.

⁷² Laura Newton, 'The Cullercoats Artists' Colony c.1870-1914', unpubl. PhD thesis, University of Northumbria, 2001, p. 9.

⁷³ Newton, 'The Cullercoats Artists' Colony', p. 36.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 35.

capital'.⁷⁵ Newton only diverges with Maelcod, when she concludes that, 'the picture-owning public was far larger, economically diverse and well informed than previous studies have suggested'.⁷⁶ Newton maintains that at the same time as these developments, industrialists, the middle class and those with 'least cultural capital' also bought 'local scenes'⁷⁷ which fostered an appreciation of northern identity across a broad class spectrum of the population.

The assertions of a northern artistic culture are historiographically patchy. For historians such as Quinn provincial artistic institutions and activities did not constitute assertions of regional difference until the later part of the century. For Newton the class analysis cannot be wholly abandoned in explaining patronage tastes and Usherwood makes no case for a self-conscious art group or sensibility in the region. The historians involved do not agree on the type of 'character' Northumberland's artists wished to portray. For Newton the emphasis on industry in representations of the north led local artists to look to the past and the rural for a local character. For Usherwood industrial Tyneside was at the heart of the region's self-identity. Quinn asserts that the maligned industrial landscape of Tyneside became incorporated 'into the identity of the region' because they had been 'hitherto excluded from artistic expression'.⁷⁸

Neither is there a consensus as to the beginning and end point of this period of supposed strong north-east identity, Newton looks to the turn of the twentieth century as the period of decline and Usherwood points to a later era, when 'in our century heavy industry in the region began to falter'. Quinn, Newton and Usherwood see the beginnings of a coherent regional artistic identity as beginning in the late nineteenth century, whereas for Robert Colls and James Gregory, the importance of local grotesques in Northumberland art at the beginning of the century grew because the area was 'in a flush of local identity',⁷⁹ which was 'distinctive ... confident and atypical'.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 36.

⁷⁶ Idem.

⁷⁷ Newton, 'The Cullercoats Artists' Colony', p. 35.

⁷⁸ Quinn, 'Their Strongest Pine', p. 124.

⁷⁹ Robert Colls, *The Collier's Rant. Song and Culture in the Industrial Village* (London, 1977), p. 50, in James Gregory, "'Local Characters": Eccentricity and the North-East in the Nineteenth Century', *Northern History* 42 (2005), p. 164.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 186.

Definitions

Local Identity

This thesis is interested in local identity, whether that is in regional or county form. The principle area that is focussed upon is Northumberland and Tyneside- comprising the areas of Cullercoats, Tynemouth and South Shields-and north Gateshead. This study will not attempt to define the 'boundaries' of localist loyalties, nor to promote a 'county', 'regional' or 'northern' identity as the most important expression of local loyalty. As the primary purpose of the thesis is to question the assumption of the rise of an integrated 'English' identity, an examination of precise local fault lines lies outside of its scope. Both the terms 'region' and 'county' are used frequently throughout the thesis. On the one hand, it would be nonsensical to cut, arbitrarily, Northumberland off from Gateshead and Tyneside when the populations and economies were so interlinked. On the other hand, sometimes the county category will be employed, especially when dealing with the 1880s to 1900, because it best fits the description of the type of 'local' art culture that was celebrated in Northumberland at this time.

This study examines the historiographical notion of 'Englishness' and 'local identity' through the study of a particular area. It demonstrates that contrary to the idea that regional artistic culture was only reflective of metropolitan-led discussions of 'Englishness', Northumberland had a strong sense of county identity and that this was often reflected in its artistic community, especially in the 1880s and 1890s. One would expect to find in a strong county artistic community two features. Firstly, from a structural point of view, well developed exhibition and patronage resources and networks, artistic clubs and schools would all need to have been in place to have allowed and encouraged artists to work, partly or wholly within the region, as well as evidence that a number were so doing.

The second facet is less tangible. It is the sense that artists working in the region thought of themselves as 'Northumbrian' artists, first and foremost, as opposed to 'English' artists, or members of a particular class. It is also the sense that depictions of the county were exhibited and collected as an expression of 'Northumberland' rather than 'class' or 'English' identity. This is demonstrable in a number of ways. Most importantly, it can be seen through the themes of artistic work. This would entail more than simply a use of

Northumbrian landscape in painting. One would expect to find some form of social or political comment having been made in these pictures, which was either particular to the locality, or demonstrably addressed to a primarily local audience. Similarly, one may find evidence of a 'school' of painting specific to the area or work having been produced in keeping with an artistic tradition. In the local area furthermore, one may see visual or thematic reference to other local artists or works in some paintings. A strong sense of county or regional identity would also come through the exhibition and patronage priorities of local galleries, institutions and patrons, as well as the stated *raison d'être* of local arts clubs.

Northumberland's Middle Class

Much of the historiographical literature on nineteenth- and early twentieth-century culture concentrates on the rise, dominance and nationalization of the middle class, or, more specifically, the simultaneous rise of the south-eastern commercial middle class and the northern industrial middle class, which have been traditionally separated in the literature. As Patrick Joyce notes 'the northern, industrial bourgeoisie are ... seen as the "poor relations" of the class structure, deficient in both capital and power'.⁸¹ This has led to the charges of philistinism from historians such as Quentin Bell and attempts to establish cultural capital for the northern middle class, by historians such as Caroline Arscott. Within these frameworks Northumberland's middle class acquires, or does not acquire, its 'culture' from the south east, but nevertheless does not have a strong county-based culture of its own. Therefore, the dominance of the class model to explain artistic taste and buying and patronage habits is not only prevalent in the historiography, but also implies that the 'cultural capital' which informed these decisions emerged from London.

Furthermore, definitions of the middle class, in the context of Northumberland, vary and are often very broad and vague. Dianne Macleod explains, in her work on Newcastle's patrons, that she uses the term 'in its widest possible social sense to apply to people who were not born into the aristocracy or gentry'.⁸² However, she later refers to her middle-class cultural agents by a series of overlapping sub-groups which include: 'entrepreneurs', 'sons of men who had prospered in the community', a 'civic minded group of

⁸¹ Patrick Joyce (ed.), *Class* (Oxford, 1995), p. 9.

⁸² Macleod, 'Private and Public Patronage', p. 188.

businessmen',⁸³ the 'intelligentsia' and the 'middle-class elite'.⁸⁴ Macleod's work is concerned to establish that the region's economic rise was linked to the development of a particular type of artistic patronage amongst the 'city's moneyed middle class'.⁸⁵ For this reason the fact that she has to rely on sub-groups to support her analysis suggests that a straight forward link between the rise of a middle class and the growth of a specific type of patronage is difficult to establish. Macleod's definition of 'middle class' is similarly broad in her study of mid-century Manchester where, the local artistic interest was confined to the 'Millocrats', demarcated at one end by the landed gentry, who had left the city and Titus Salt's workers, brought to the Art Treasures Exhibition, at the other.

Laura Newton appreciates that in practical terms Macleod is concerned primarily with a very small group of wealthy industrialists and businessmen. She therefore attempts to broaden the definition to include 'that faceless, and often nameless, multitude'⁸⁶ because she sees that by the end of the nineteenth century a 'far larger, economically diverse'⁸⁷ middle class had become involved in art buying. In contrast to Macleod Newton is much less concerned to attempt to establish sub-groups or to investigate whether these groups had distinctive artistic identities.

The different analyses of Newton and Macleod highlight that the term has often been used either too inclusively to be useful or it relies too heavily on the analysis of sub-groups to convincingly identify a middle-class artistic character. Similarly, by concentrating on the class-bound habits of the public, such an analysis both ignores the work of the artist and paradoxically places him outside of the class framework, simplistically assuming either that the artist's only concern is to pander to pre-existing taste, in order to profit, or that the artist is entirely removed from normal social structures by his 'genius'.

This study demonstrates that it is possible to conceive of county or regional culture as more than just an expression of the middle class that is present in the historiography, with its hierarchies of provincial/metropolitan, northern/south-eastern and industrial/commercial. Because of this and because the

⁸³ All three terms from Macleod, 'Private and Public Patronage', p. 192.

⁸⁴ Both terms from Macleod, 'Private and Public Patronage', p. 193.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

⁸⁶ Newton, 'The Cullercoats Artists' Colony', p. 36.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

inherent difficulties in defining and demarcating between classes, this study does not attempt to define class nor to ascribe behaviour in class terms.

However, the study does make reference to the activities of 'artistic elites'. This term is used to mean those individuals who were often involved in artistic organizations, such as exhibition and gallery committees, but who were nevertheless not artists, but often art patrons and benefactors to art institutions. Although such individuals were often wealthy and could be involved in such activities because of their financial and social situations, and indeed their class position may have created their cultural habitus, nevertheless this thesis does not attribute their behaviour to their class status.

The term 'class homogenization' is used, in this study, to mean that nationalization of culture which led to greater similarities between members of the same class.

Artistic Culture

The idea of artistic culture is central to this study, yet, as Raymond Williams concedes, it 'is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language'.⁸⁸ In this study the word 'culture' and the phrase 'artistic culture' neither imply 'class associations'⁸⁹ nor an Arnoldian sense of the word as 'the true nurse of ... sweetness and light'.⁹⁰ It is rather used in a more subjective sense as the 'body of ... imaginative work, in which ... human thought and experience are variously recorded ... in relation to particular traditions and societies'.⁹¹

However, it is important to note the different associations of the words 'art' and 'culture' during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Williams has noted 'Culture as an independent noun ... is not common before the middle of the nineteenth century'. It was a term that was often used to describe the 'human' life of, particularly, 'the nation', and by the late century, its chief symbols became 'music, literature, painting and sculpture [and] theatre'. Although it could be used in the subjective, rather than the

⁸⁸ Williams, *Keywords*, p. 87.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

⁹⁰ Dover Wilson, (ed.), *Arnold, Matthew, Culture and Anarchy* (Cambridge, 1932), p. 108.

⁹¹ Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (London, 1961), p. 43.

absolute sense, it had acquired, by the end of century, a usage with 'claims to superior knowledge ... refinement ... and distinctions between high art culture and popular art and entertainment'. It was at this point that, at least according to Williams, 'hostility to the word ... appears'⁹² and the definition begins to move towards that of the dominant modern usage, which does not include an explicit value judgement. This being the case, wherever the term culture is taken from a primary source, it is most often being used in the older sense.

'Art' went through a similar shift in meaning in the middle of the nineteenth century. 'The emergence of an abstract, capitalised Art ... is difficult to localise ... but it was in the nineteenth century that the concept became general. It is historically related, in this sense, to culture'.⁹³ So that: 'the artist is then distinct ... from artisan or craftsman and skilled worker'.⁹⁴ From the development of these terms one can sense the growing attempt, by contemporary commentators like Arnold, to define culture and art by a set of absolute standards. John Ruskin, as Slade professor at Oxford, was, in particular, concerned to promulgate definitions of these terms within an English context.⁹⁵ This study is concerned only with pictorial art and therefore does not include the work of craftsmen or artisans. The term 'notable artist' is used to mean any artist included in Marshall Hall, *The Artists of Northumbria*,⁹⁶ which is the most comprehensive dictionary of locally famous artists.

The Choice of Area

The artistic scenes of northern cities such as Manchester have been studied by historians like Alan Kidd and K.W. Roberts⁹⁷ and Janet Wolff and John Seed,⁹⁸ whose work also examines towns including Leeds. Similarly, Macleod's study of middle-class artistic consumption makes detailed studies of both Manchester

⁹² Williams, *Keywords*, p.p. 88-94.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

⁹⁵ This study is concerned with only pictorial art, for reasons of brevity and clarity.

⁹⁶ Marshall Hall, *The Artists of Northumbria: An Illustrated Dictionary of Northumberland, Newcastle upon Tyne, Durham and North East Yorkshire Painters, Sculptors, Engravers, Stained Glass Designers, Illustrators, Caricaturists and Cartoonists born Between 1625 and 1950* (Bristol, 2003).

⁹⁷ Kidd and Roberts, *City, Class and Culture*.

⁹⁸ Wolff and Seed, *Culture of Capital*.

and Birmingham. The artistic works of certain London boroughs have also been well researched by historians such as Paul Barlow and Colin Todd.⁹⁹ Similarly, Giles Waterfield's study of art initiatives in Britain's slums focuses on two galleries in London, one in Manchester and one near Sheffield.¹⁰⁰

Comparatively, cities and areas in the north east have been relatively under-represented in broad collections on Victorian and nineteenth-century artistic culture, with a few exceptions, such as in Trevor Fawcett's work.¹⁰¹ This is understandable given that Newcastle, often viewed as Northumberland's cultural capital, was slow to give its artistic community any means of permanent display and deprived its citizens of a municipal gallery until long after similar schemes had been adopted elsewhere. The Laing Art Gallery, a municipal project, opened its doors in 1904; some 24 years after Sunderland opened a municipal gallery in the city's library and museum building. Furthermore, private artistic enterprises flourished more readily in other areas. The Royal Manchester Institution, established in 1823, was successful at least until the 1840s, generating thousands of pounds worth of business through its annual exhibitions and 'declaring that art was an important part of Manchester's emerging public culture'.¹⁰² Because of the slow development of private and public artistic patronage in the area, historians such as Paul Quinn note that 'it has become the norm to ... treat the local art world of the north east ... as a footnote to the history of the more important and better known aspects of the period.'¹⁰³ Because Northumberland and Tyneside occupy no special place in the artistic historiography it is a highly suitable area by which to investigate local artistic identity. This is because its lack of special status means that it is less likely to be atypical of regional experience in other under-researched geographical areas.

Notes on Sources

Newcastle Central Library, which collects much of the newspaper material used for this study, was housed, for most of the period of writing, in temporary accommodation. For this reason, many of the newspaper

⁹⁹ Barlow and Todd, (eds.) *Governing Cultures*.

¹⁰⁰ Giles Waterfield, (ed.), *Art for the People: Culture in the Slums of Late Victorian Britain* (London, 1994).

¹⁰¹ Fawcett, *Rise of English Provincial Art*.

¹⁰² John Seed, "'Commerce and the Liberal Arts': The Political Economy of Art in Manchester, 1775-1860" in Wolff and Seed, *Culture of Capital*, p. 55.

¹⁰³ Quinn, 'Picturing Locality', p. 27.

resources had been withdrawn from circulation. It was particularly problematic retrieving newspapers from the 1930s and so one was not as able as one would have liked to make use of reviews of Ashington Group exhibitions or Laing Art Gallery exhibitions.

Similarly, the Laing Art Gallery has no material relating to exhibitions held during the First World War, beyond a list of the exhibition titles. Therefore, it was impossible to attempt a study on the impact of the war on the short-term artistic priorities of the gallery and Northumberland's artists.

Some material relating to the fine art syllabus and student enrolment at Armstrong College was also not available as much of the information regarding the workings of the college before the Second World War, is currently being catalogued at the Registrar's Office of Newcastle University.

Chapter Synopses

In the first chapter, the focus of the study will examine the period 1822-c.1832, between the opening of the Northumberland Institution and the closing of the Northern Academy of the Arts, and examine an artistic-cultural world in which 'the local' was synonymous with the un-cultured. During this period artistic activity in Northumberland was very similar to that in other regions and particularly there was a nation-wide movement, led by artists, to professionalize their role as public arbiters of taste. This battle was played out in the local press and art societies, in a way that suggested inspiration from similar developments in London. Indeed, this movement was an essential first step in the formation of the role of 'local artist' because such a figure could not exist until the artist was seen as a professional and as a potential arbiter of public taste, equal to the gentleman patron.

The second chapter will examine the role of the Government School of Design, later the School of Fine Art in Newcastle, in the period between the inception of the North of England Society in 1838 to the retirement of the Government School's first headmaster, William Bell Scott in 1863. This chapter will explore the positive role of national initiatives in the development of regional art identity later in the century, by suggesting that it was this government initiative which led to the support and strengthening of regional

organization and identity, as well as furthering professionalizing the role of the local artist. The chapter will focus on the work of the Government School, which taught most of the prominent local artists of the 1870s-1900s, contrary to the edicts issued by Somerset House to train men and boys specifically for industrial design. Despite the fact that the government's scheme operated on principles of central control, the nature of the first bid for government aid by the North of England Society and the rebellious nature of Scott, meant that the Newcastle school achieved a much greater level of independence than many of its counterparts. It also established networks between local artists and it gave these artists a set of shared artistic and theoretical references, which bound them together. A sense of regional identity, as depicted through art, was also available to students of the schools, through the work of Scott, whose murals at Wallington Hall, depicted the history of Northumberland.

The third chapter will examine the battles between a local and a national conception of the artist and art production, display and exhibition, through an examination of the Arts Association's exhibitions between 1878 and 1882. The failure of this society was largely due to their neglect of the local artist and any local specificity in the works exhibited, at a time when artists who had been trained in the government school were beginning to emerge on the local art scene. Such artists, as a consequence of the nation-wide developments in the professionalization of art in the 1820s and 1830s, were able to assert themselves as equal to patrons as public arbiters of taste. Similarly, the Government School had given them a sense of themselves as Northumbrian artists, through the building of local art networks. The Arts Association and its emphasis on the display of non-local art was therefore marginalized by artists who thought of themselves as local professionals, precisely because of the earlier nation-wide and centrally-led developments in artistic identity.

The fourth chapter will explore the art world of Northumberland, between the beginning of the Bewick Club in 1883 and the opening of the Laing Art Gallery in 1904. It will demonstrate that a strong local and especially county identity existed in Northumberland's artistic community and will concentrate on the paintings that were produced by Northumberland's artists in this period. The paintings, which are examined, made comment on local issues and positioned their artists as 'insiders' in the county's culture.

However, although the market allowed artists to emphasize their local identity, some artists chose to play down county or local identity in their work and to produce works that emphasized their 'Englishness'.

The fifth chapter will focus on the same period, but will look at the way that artists and art enthusiasts arranged themselves into art clubs to further their professional interests. Indeed, far from being an expression of middle-class identity, the different clubs showed very different social compositions and most often what bound members of different clubs together was the professional and commercial interests of the local artists, who sold through the local market, rather than a class identity.

The sixth chapter will study the early history of the Laing Art Gallery until the beginning of the First World War. It will demonstrate that the running of the gallery was not based upon the civic pride of either the middle class or the corporation. One of the most important issues that surrounded the gallery was the way it sought to exclude professional artists and depictions of the local in all but their least sophisticated guises. The early history of the gallery is the history of an artistic elite. This raises questions of much of the historiography, for example, the decline of elite influence and independent provincial culture as well as the role of the public gallery in civic pride and authority.

The period of the First World War and its immediate aftermath would have been an interesting period to investigate. However, sources relating to the Laing's exhibitions during the period are very scant as are other relevant sources. For example, no Laing Gallery exhibition catalogues for the period of the First World War remain and detailed information on the Fine Art course at Armstrong College is also difficult to obtain before the Second World War.

The seventh chapter will show that by the 1930s many features of Northumberland's art world in the 1830s had been re-established. During the 1930s professional artists were trained at Durham University which used a nationally- standardized syllabus, making no reference to the artistic traditions of the area. The Laing Gallery continued to privilege non-local art and the Mass Observation Group incorrectly portrayed the Ashington Group or 'Pitmen Painters', as purveyors of 'working-class culture'. In this period younger

Northumberland artists became divorced from large, popular audiences and as such their work became increasingly more diverse and less locally focused. The era of county and therefore local identity had passed and the dynamics of Northumberland's art world returned to their pre-1880s status quo.

The conclusion will advance the notion that the Northumberland community was negotiating a sense of regional identity for itself, at a time when art in the capital was interested in the idea of national identity. At this point the evidence from other areas will be explored to see if there were similar developments occurring elsewhere. The conclusion will then highlight the fact that, contrary to the 'nationalization of culture' thesis there was often a strong local identity in the local art markets, produced by local artists. Furthermore, the growth of national initiatives could strengthen regional art scenes, rather than subjugating them and that these scenes were often not class based. By widening the study in terms of geography the conclusion will suggest that a new framework be investigated, through which relationships between the regional and national art worlds of England can be viewed as interacting in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

Chapter One

Northumberland and the National Scene 1822-c. 1832.¹

The historiographical consensus is that the early to mid nineteenth century was a period which saw both the rise of watercolour painting and the artist as professional. Indeed, Andrew Hemingway characterizes the early nineteenth century as one of increasing artistic professionalization. This process was, undoubtedly, due in part to the increasing 'autonomy of the intellectual field', but equally important was the artists' desire to place painting on a less precarious economic footing.² This was an issue because, as Josephine Gear argues, the era between 1760 and 1840 was an age of aristocratic dominance in the field of arts' patronage, which meant that the artist, in order to secure an income, was required to outlay considerable expenditure on creating the large-scale oils that were fashionable amongst aristocratic collectors.³ This, in turn, meant that artists had limited imaginative freedom or social standing.

Artists who could not secure patronage were therefore keen to create new markets for their painting, which circumvented the need to supplement their income in more traditional ways, such as 'frame-making, scene-painting and print-making'.⁴ Indeed, as Fawcett notes, 'London artists were beginning to associate in informal societies' for this purpose as early as 1799.⁵ Watercolours required less capital outlay and 'the beauties of fertile landscape were understood by almost all'.⁶ In order to sell these paintings galleries appeared that were intended, to a greater or lesser extent, as show cases for such paintings. Such an idea formed part of the British Institution's remit and was arguably the *raison d'être* of the Society of Painters

¹ These dates were chosen because 1822 was the year that T.M. Richardson established the Northumberland Institution for the Promotion of the Fine Arts, the first major exhibition society in Northumberland. 1832 saw Richardson's second enterprise, The Northern Academy of the Arts closed and the opening of the Newcastle Institution for the Promotion of the Fine Arts, open under the auspices of the Friends of the Arts group. However, some of the material in this chapter relates to the conception of taste, as propounded by the Newcastle Society of Artists in its 1835 first exhibition retrospective.

² Andrew Hemingway, *Landscape Imagery and Urban Culture in Early Nineteenth Century Britain* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 294.

³ Josephine Gear, *Masters or Servants? A Study of Selected English Painters and their Patrons of the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Century* (New York, 1977).

⁴ Hemingway, *Landscape Imagery*, p. 42.

⁵ Fawcett, *Rise of English Provincial Art*, p. 201.

⁶ Hemingway, *Landscape Imagery*, p. 295.

in Watercolours' gallery, which was, according to Greg Smith, 'first and foremost a commercial enterprise'.⁷

However, the respectability and professional status of the artist was not yet secured. As Hemingway points out, the dominant philosophy of taste conceived of the artist as a slave to fashion and the dictates of patrons. Indeed, the provincial artist suffered from a double stigma. As Paul Quinn notes, the legacy of philosophers such as Joshua Reynolds meant that 'the local was identified as a place in which caprice, fashion and prejudice reign'.⁸ For many critics therefore the provincial artists was the least desirable monitor of public taste and that role was better left, in their opinion, to the gentlemen who were thought to be able to distance themselves from such temporal and fleeting concerns. For example, many critics believed that artists should not be allowed to run exhibitions unaided by patrons and gentlemen. Fawcett explains that 'it seems ... to have been a general suspicion that professional artists could not be trusted to run an exhibition on their own. Evidence to the contrary was greeted with surprise'.⁹

Such developments can be seen in Northumberland in the 1820s and the 1830s. Although the end of the nineteenth century, Northumberland's art market, exhibition societies and distinctive subject treatment had flourished, this was not the product of some natural state of Northumbrian independence. The art world of early nineteenth-century Northumberland was a great deal more integrated into the national art networks and debates before and during the early part of Queen Victorian's reign.

Firstly, many of the members of the various art societies in Northumberland had personal and professional links to other artists' groups, both in the capital and elsewhere. There was an embryonic 'community' of artists based in Northumberland and active in the different local institutions, but this 'community' was only part of a larger artistic community which was based on occupation and not geographical association. Many of Northumberland's artists had, for example, spent time living in London, or had London addresses.

⁷ Greg Smith, 'The Watercolour as Commodity: the Exhibitions of the Society of Painters in Watercolours, 1805-1812' in Andrew Hemingway and William Vaughan, *Art in Bourgeois Society, 1790-1850* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 45.

⁸ Paul Quinn, 'Picturing Locality: Art and Regional Identity in the North East of England', unpubl. PhD thesis, University of Sunderland, 1997, p. 116.

⁹ Fawcett, *Rise of English Provincial Art*, p. 121.

Furthermore, many exhibited at London exhibitions; between 200 and 300 hundred provincial artists, country wide between 1780 and 1830 in some estimates; as well as at other provincial exhibitions in England and most importantly at the Royal Scottish Academy.¹⁰

Secondly, the debate on the role of artists, as arbiters of public taste, raged throughout this period and this extended into Northumberland's art world. Clearly, before the local artist was able to regard himself, and be regarded as, the 'artist-seer ... amongst his people ... withdrawn for the centre of society', he needed to be secure in his public position.¹¹ In repositioning himself from 'superior domestic servant'¹² through 'professionalization',¹³ the artist in Northumberland was in a similar position to that of his counterparts elsewhere in the country. Furthermore, the artists in Northumberland self-consciously modelled the galleries and artist societies they began, in order to establish their positions and free themselves from the need for patronage, on institutions in London which had also attempted to improve the artists' status and economic well being, such as the Society of Painters in Watercolours, established in 1805 and the British Institution. Indeed, such Northumberland institutions were established with the assistance of the local artists' connections across the country.

However, just as was the case across England, so Northumberland's artists were not without severe criticism from those who believed artists unfit to be public arbiters of taste, being, as they necessarily were, too embroiled in the economics and fashions of art to remain aloof and objective. These critics set out to rectify what they saw as the deficiency in public art, created by such artist-run galleries and societies, by attacks in the press and the establishment of their own institutions which were administered by patrons and other members of the artistic elite.

¹⁰ Fawcett, *Rise of English Provincial Art*, p. 206.

¹¹ Paul Quinn, "'Their Strongest Pine': Thomas Bewick and Regional Identity in the Late Nineteenth Century Bewick" in Bewick Society, *Bewick Studies, Essays in Celebration of the 250th Anniversary of the Birth of Thomas Bewick 1753-1828* (Northumberland, 2003), p. 120.

¹² Andrew Hemingway, *Landscape Imagery*, p. 43.

¹³ Hemingway, *Landscape Imagery*, p. 40.

Thirdly, the contemporary definition of taste was such that it precluded the local from asserting itself whilst still remaining artistically legitimate. Paul Quinn has done much of the ground work in this respect.¹⁴

Indeed, there was little resistance to this definition of taste and such a definition was employed by many artists and critics to legitimate their differing stances in regard to the role of the local exhibiting society.

Fourthly, the artistic connections of regional artists and societies as well as, for many artists, the shared conception of being part of a national school, meant that the art produced in Northumberland was little different to that produced both in other provincial areas and in the metropolis. Landscape painters did produce regional scenes and portraits of local notables, but these conformed to the dictates of Romantic, Picturesque and Sublime painting, in the case of the former and formulaic portrait commission work, in the case of the latter. Similarly, the paintings that notable artists chose to display in Northumberland's exhibition spaces hardly differed from those which were sent to exhibitions across the country.

The Northumberland art world of the 1820s and 1830s saw the growth of many artistic 'institutions' and 'academies'. However, despite the many different names, often groups were linked by personnel or transacted under a series of different titles. The first was the Northumberland Institution for the Promotion of the Fine Arts, established in 1822 by Thomas Miles Richardson Senior (1784-1848). The Institution began life because Richardson sought space in which to display his own work. This scheme was quickly abandoned however and the Institute was then formed to oversee an annual display of British pictures. Accusations of self-seeking on Richardson's part continued however. Newspapers such as the *Tyne Mercury* envisaged that the Institution should develop in a manner akin to the city's Literary and Philosophical Society. Arguments of this nature created internal divisions at the institution, which led to Richardson and his new partner Henry Perlee Parker (1795-1873), to abandon the project in favour of a joint-private venture called the Northern Academy of the Arts, which saw the pair financing the building of a dedicated venue on Blackett Street. Financial losses meant that Richardson and Parker were forced to sell the academy in 1831 to cover debts amounting to £1,700. When the academy was re-opened as a public enterprise, under the name of the Newcastle Institution for the General Promotion of the Fine Arts, it was

¹⁴ Quinn, 'Their Strongest Pine'.

headed by some of Richardson's most fierce critics but only lasted two years until 1834. In 1838 the North of England Society was established as an 'off-shoot' of the Literary and Philosophical Society.¹⁵

Meanwhile Richardson began the Northern Society of Painters in Watercolours, which was instituted in 1831, and with Parker, the Newcastle Society of Artists, which ran from 1833.¹⁶ By 1842 the North of England Society had run into so much debt that it applied for financing from the Board of Trade, thereby it was subsumed under the Government Schools of Design scheme.¹⁷

Regional and National Networks

There was a closely-knit community of artists in Northumberland between 1822 and 1832, who were involved in the various exhibition initiatives in the area. The main focal points of these networks were Thomas Bewick (1753-1828), John Wilson Carmichael (1799-1868) and Thomas Miles Richardson Senior. One of Bewick's apprentices, William Harvey (1796-1866), was an honorary committee member of the Northumberland Institution for the Promotion of the Fine Arts from 1823-1827, at the same time as Bewick and his son Robert Bewick (1788-1849) were members.¹⁸ The Bewicks were also committee members for the Northumberland Institute at the same time as Emerson Charnley (n.d.), Thomas Sword Good (1789-1872), who was an honorary member born in Berwick; and James Ramsay (1786-1854). Charnley's father was a family friend who printed the Bewick-illustrated *Select Fables* in 1820. Ramsay painted his first portrait of Thomas Bewick in 1816. Around the same time, Ramsay also painted a portrait of fellow Northumberland Institute committee member Edward Swinburne (1765-1847). Thomas Sword Good (1789-1872) painted a portrait of Thomas Bewick in 1827, and according to Marshall Hall this was

¹⁵ Robert Spence Watson, *The History of the Literary and Philosophical Society of Newcastle upon Tyne (1793-1896)* (London, 1897), p. 314.

¹⁶ Reference is also made to a 'Society for the Promotion of Painting, Sculpture, Architecture, Mechanics &c' in the *Tyne Mercury* 19 January 1836, although no more information on this institution can be found.

¹⁷ For a fuller account of the history of Northumberland's art institutions in the period see Paul Usherwood and Kenneth Bowden, *Art for Newcastle: Thomas Miles and the Newcastle Exhibitions 1822-1843* (Newcastle, 1984).

¹⁸ A John Anderson is mentioned as a trustee in the committee lists for the Newcastle Institution for the General Promotion of the Fine Arts. This may have been the John Anderson who had been apprenticed to Thomas Bewick from 1792 to 1799. However, according to Marshall Hall, *The Artists of Northumbria: An Illustrated Dictionary of Northumberland, Newcastle upon Tyne, Durham and North East Yorkshire Painters, Sculptors, Engravers, Stained Glass Designers, Illustrators, Caricaturists and Cartoonists born Between 1625 and 1950* (Bristol, 2003), he is believed to have emigrated in 1803 or 1804, and Hall can find no bibliographical information beyond this point.

probably not the only one.¹⁹ Good was also on friendly terms with Robert Bewick. The latter was staying with Good, at his home in Berwick in 1832, when Good's mother died. Good wrote in a letter to William Lizars: 'not an hour before her departure ... she was leaning on Mr. Bewick's arm walking in our little garden'.²⁰

John Wilson Carmichael was apprenticed to Richard Farrington's shipbuilding company. Richard Farrington was not an artist but a Northumberland Institute committee member and shipbuilder. Indeed, it was Joseph Farrington who first encouraged the young Carmichael to paint. Thomas Thorpe (n.d.) was a member of the Newcastle Society of Artists from 1836 at the same time as Carmichael. Carmichael also collaborated with Parker on their *Grace Darling Going to the Rescue of the Forfarshire Survivors* (1839) and John Dobson (1787-1845); who was on the committee for the Northumberland Institute at the same time as Richard Farrington; on a number of his compositions from the 1830s to 1840s in which Carmichael painted the figures in Dobson's architectural drawings.

Thomas Miles Richardson Senior, the founder of the Northumberland Institute, Northern Academy, Newcastle Society of Artists and Northern Society for Painters in Watercolours, had a number of other links to the committee members of these groups. Parker was instrumental in helping Richardson to found both the Northumberland Institute and was a joint partner in the Northern Academy. Richardson's son, one of a number of artistically talented close family members, was a member of the Newcastle Society of Artists at the same time as his father, from 1836. Richardson also collaborated with John Dobson in a similar way as Carmichael had done. Richardson also worked with William Dixon (d. c. 1830); a Northumberland Institute committee member; on a series of aquatint views of Newcastle in around 1816. Dixon went onto work with John Dobson, who 'amused his leisure hours' by creating drop-scenes for Newcastle's theatre with him, in the early 1830s.²¹

¹⁹ Hall, *Artists of Northumbria*, p. 144.

²⁰ Letter from Thomas Good to William Lizars, 15 October 1832, quoted in Edwin Bowes, *In a Strong Light, The Art of Thomas Sword Good* (Berwick, 1989), p. 18.

²¹ Margaret Jane Dobson, *Memoir of John Dobson of Newcastle upon Tyne, Member of the Royal Institution of British Architects, Containing some Account of the Revival of Architecture in the North of England with a List of his works* (London, 1885), p. 16.

However, although there were many network links between the committee members of the various groups, very few of these men were professionally and personally connected only to others in Northumberland, or indeed in the north east. Of the 21 committee men whose residential movements are known, 15 lived for a time in London. Indeed, of the 20 whose birthplace has been established, only 11 were born in Northumberland and a further three in the wider north east, including north Yorkshire. For example, James Ramsey was born in Sheffield. Many members spent long periods of time living or working as artists in other counties. For example, Good spent two years, between 1810- 1812, as an apprentice in London and later he spent time living and working in Edinburgh, where he became acquainted with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood through William Bell Scott.

More importantly perhaps many members had professional links to other exhibition societies across the country. John Ewbank (c.1799-1847) was a member of the Royal Scottish Academy, as were Good, Senior and Parker. Similarly, William Andrews Nesfield (1794-1881) and Thomas Richardson Junior (1813-1890) were members of London's Old Watercolour Society. Parker, Richardson Senior, Ramsey, Carmichael, and Thomas Sword Good were all regular exhibitors at the Royal Academy and Joseph Crawhall (1821-1896), John Dobson and David Dunbar (1782-1866) exhibited on occasion. There were also other professional links to areas outside of the region. For example, William Dixon was associated with the Gravel Pits Colony in London and Parker became Drawing Master of Wesley College in Sheffield in 1841.

The Development of the Professional Artist in Northumberland

The efforts of those involved in the Northumberland Institution and its successors were caught up in the very debates which also raged in the metropolis and across the country and which are described in the historiography. Just as with the Society of Painters in Watercolours' gallery, the committee of the Northumberland Institute was directed by artists and ran with profit in mind. Similarly, the main detractors of this institution and the establishing members of the North of England Academy were acutely anxious about the effects of an artists' run gallery and were keen to bring this issue to the public's attention, before rectifying the situation by establishing artistic elite-organised gallery of their own. Similarly, those who

sought to lambaste the artists' institutions used the language of the philosophy of taste, which also posited the metropolitan centre as the best example of art practice. Furthermore, the artists involved were keen to utilize the models and experience of other institutions across the country, without reference to geographical place and exploit their access to national networks of artists in order to achieve their aim. In this way, the experiences of the art institutions between 1822-c. 1832 were the expressions of national debates and movements and in no sense did these experiences reflect a conscious, or even subconscious, county distinctiveness.

The first notable exhibition society in Northumberland was the Northumberland Institute for the Promotion of the Fine Arts. The establishment of the Institute was directly due to the type of financial instability, similar to that of most artists without patrons, during the early part of the century. Richardson Senior's resignation from his position as headmaster of Saint Andrew's Parish School in 1813 marked the beginning of, as Lyall Wilkes stresses, 'a period' of 'financial anxiety' from which he was never 'free for long'.²² Richardson's decision to establish a gallery came from the same pressures felt by many non-patronized artists across the country.

The committee of the institution was almost free from the local artistic elite and comprised mostly artists and architects including, Parker, Dobson, Bewick and James Ramsey. The committee had: 'the entire duty of forming and arranging the exhibitions ... and ... the unlimited power to adopt or reject all works of art presented to them'.²³ The institute was recognized as having a role to play in the assistance of artists. The *Tyne Mercury* listed 'the fostering (and creating) of provincial talent' as one of its great strengths of purpose.²⁴ However, press sentiment was not as supportive when it came to one of the other main aims of the society, to act as a commercial vehicle for the artists involved, An anonymous letter to the *Tyne*

²² Lyall Wilkes, *Tyneside Portraits* (Gateshead, 1971), p. 79.

²³ William Carey, *Observations of the Primary Object of The British Institution and of the Provincial Institutions for the Promotion of the Fine Arts; Showing the Necessity, the Wisdom, and the Moral Glory of Cherishing a National Spirit in the Patronage of the British School, and a National Pride in the Excellence of The British Artists. Respectfully Addressed to the Nobility, Gentry, and Opulent Classes, in the United Kingdom* (Newcastle, 1829), p. 45.

²⁴ *Tyne Mercury*, 1 October 1822.

Mercury asked 'why are these institutions established?' and answered rhetorically 'are they not for the encouragement of artists ... by getting their work sold? ... I am almost ashamed to mention this'.²⁵

The artists of the early century were trying to rescue themselves from the tyranny of patronage-or lack of patronage-felt by artists across the country. Indeed, Richardson had been inspired to become a professional artist by a David Cox (1783-1859) painting which he saw in a dealer's window in the Strand. As Wilkes notes 'Richardson ... had never seen any exhibition ... and had never previously heard of David Cox'.²⁶ This debt he felt he owed to *British* artists, for inspiring him, was confirmed by the direction he wished to see his gallery take. Admittedly, the gallery was primarily a private economic venture, but according to Usherwood and Bowden, on 'finding ... he had insufficient pictures to cover the walls of the gallery ... [he] resolved upon trying to get up an exhibition of British artists'.²⁷ Richardson's decision to devote his professional life to art was then the result of an encounter with art in the metropolis, the like to which Northumberland's residents had no direct access. As such it is little wonder that Richardson chose, or was forced, to seek models for the running of his gallery in the institutions to be found in London.

The name of Richardson's first establishment bore strong relation to that of the British Institution for the Promotion of the Fine Arts. Anne Pullan's history of that institution notes that its founding principle was 'to encourage the talents of the Artists of the United Kingdom'.²⁸ Whether it envisaged itself as an institution established for 'the promotion of history painting'²⁹ or the 'improve [ment] [of] ... our manufactures',³⁰ It seems to have taken seriously its role as the promoter of artists, because Pullan notes that, between 1806 and 1859, 7,638 works by old masters and 'deceased British Artists' were shown,³¹ but, in the same period 23,150 works by living British artists were displayed, with sales amounting to £150,000.

³² The Northumberland Institution seems to have followed this model. As William Carey wrote in 1828:

²⁵ *Tyne Mercury*, 15 October 1822.

²⁶ Wilkes, *Tyneside Portraits*, p. 78.

²⁷ Anon, *Henry Perlee Parker or An Artist's Narrative (Retold)*, (Newcastle, 1936), p. 36.

²⁸ Anne Pullan, 'The British Institution in the Early Nineteenth Century' in Hemingway and Vaughan, *Art in Bourgeois Society*, p. 27.

²⁹ Pullan, 'British Institution', p. 27

³⁰ *Idem*.

³¹ Pullan, 'British Institution', p. 30.

³² *Idem*.

‘the example of the British Institution has been rendered influential ... in distant districts ... [it has] excited many persons ... to become active promoters of provincial institutions’.³³

The institution did invite several local patrons to lend from their private collections and the institute’s official patrons included local notables and aristocrats from across the country, for example Edward Swinburne, the marquis of Londonderry, Earl Grey, Thomas Liddell M.P., Earl Tankerville and Lord Ravensworth. However, the institution’s exhibitions were dominated by the works of committee members, not least Thomas Richardson, who, ‘in the 1820s ... never showed less than seven pictures a year and in most years double that number’.³⁴ ‘Parker ran a close second ... in 1828 [he exhibited] 23’ pictures.³⁵ At the 1826 exhibition committee members such as John Wilson Carmichael, Robert Mackreth (1766-1860) and Andrew Morton (1802-1845) exhibited and Morton showed seven works. Of the Honorary Members, Good exhibited two paintings and Ewbank 16.³⁶ In the 1823 exhibition, exhibiting committee and honorary members included Parker, who exhibited eight pictures, Richardson, who exhibited 12 pictures and John Ewbank, who exhibited six.³⁷ Similarly, the 1830 exhibition at the Northern Academy also included displays by members of the disbanded Institute, such as Mackreth and Carmichael, as well as Richardson Senior and Parker, who were the owners of the gallery.³⁸

The Northern Academy, set up to distance Richardson from the failed institution, was a private venture, undertaken without a committee, to allow Richardson and his new partner Parker to have greater freedom of control. Even so, the Academy was still run as a practical economic solution to the problem of the scarcity of patronage and still invited many committee members of the former institution to exhibit and sell their works. However, Richardson can still be seen to be borrowing ideas from London societies in order to

³³ Carey, *Observations*, p. 50.

³⁴ Bowden and Usherwood, *Art for Newcastle*, p. 30.

³⁵ *Idem*.

³⁶ Figures calculated from Northumberland Institute for the Promotion of the Fine Arts, *Fifth Annual Exhibition of Pictures of the Northumberland Institute for the Promotion of the Fine Arts 1826* (Newcastle, 1826).

³⁷ Figures calculated from Northumberland Institute for the Promotion of the Fine Arts, *Second Annual Exhibition of Pictures of the Northumberland Institute for the Promotion of the Fine Arts 1823* (Newcastle, 1823).

³⁸ Figures calculated from Northern Academy of Arts, *Northern Academy of Arts First Annual Exhibition 1828* (Newcastle, 1830).

keep his own venture economically viable. Firstly, as at the Royal Academy, Richardson and Parker envisaged that the Northern Academy would be run without the aid of patrons and gentlemen. Secondly, as the British Institution had, so the Northern Academy sought to raise extra income by raising subscriptions. However, although the British Institute had, by 1821, 257 subscribers, the latter was less fortunate.³⁹ The Newcastle Corporation gave an annual subscription of five pounds and annual subscriptions from other sources amounted to £42 in 1828.⁴⁰

Unlike the British Institution the Northumberland Institution had little enthusiasm for Old Masters. Nevertheless Parker and Richardson embarked on such an exhibition in 1828, 'following a British Institution lead'.⁴¹ Bowden and Usherwood believe that such an exhibition was attempted to 'win favour with the gentry ... as well as the press'.⁴² However, in keeping with the original commercial aims of Richardson's undertakings, Parker lamented to William Nicholson, a Newcastle man, who had contributed to the Northumberland Institution's exhibitions and had recently become the Secretary of the Royal Scottish Academy in Edinburgh that 'I might have liked the Old Masters better had they the means of sending me a little more cash'.⁴³

There is some debate as to whether the Northern Academy was consciously established on the British Institution or the Royal Academy model. Paul Quinn believes that, at first, the Academy imitated its London namesake-or at least this is how the local press regarded the venture. Later, with the introduction of the Old Masters' exhibition Quinn notes 'a shift occurs ... to emulating the British Institution'.⁴⁴ However, the administration of the Academy shows evidence of influence from both institutions. Indeed, Carey mentioned the fact that a 'worthy gentleman' had approached Richardson and asked him to change the name back to The Institution, as that had better connotations. Whichever was the principle model for the

³⁹ Pullan, 'British Institution', p. 35.

⁴⁰ Carey, *Observations*, p. 49.

⁴¹ Fawcett, *Rise of English Provincial Art*, p. 121.

⁴² Bowden and Usherwood, *Art for Newcastle*, p. 24.

⁴³ Letter Parker to Nicholson, 13 November, 1828, quoted in Bowden and Usherwood, *Art for Newcastle*, p. 24.

⁴⁴ Quinn, 'Picturing Locality', p. 111.

exhibition ... was the number and standing ... of the exhibitors from London ... [without them] audiences, reviewers and potential buyers could not be expected to come'.⁵⁰ Richardson, and later Parker-in connection with the Northern Academy-were able to utilize their many contacts to the outside artistic world. William Carey noted that one of Richardson's first tasks in 1822 was to write to William Harvey: 'a painter, designer and engraver ... resident in London', to ask if he could help to recruit London artists to send pictures to the Northumberland exhibition.⁵¹ Similarly, at the establishment of the Northern Academy, Richardson and Parker relied on Nicholson, who used his connections to Francis Danby to have *Valley of the Upas Tree* (1820) sent to Newcastle for the 1828 exhibition.

The Northumberland Institution, the Northern Academy and the Northern Society were all envisaged as commercial enterprises, over which the artists involved were to have greater control over the sale and promotion of their work, than had previously been the case when they had had to rely on the vagaries of patronage. In such cases, the models of the British Institution, the Royal Academy and the Society of Painters in Watercolours were used. Each model had its benefits. The British Institution, unlike the Royal Academy was not seen to 'abhor the taint of the saleroom'.⁵² The Royal Academy was free from the control of gentlemen patrons. The Society of Painters in Watercolours was run primarily for the benefit of watercolour painters, who found it difficult to display work in other exhibitions that were typically dominated by oils. The Northumberland artists' first intention was to create a secure platform for themselves, in order to better promote sales. However, in order to do this given the lack of local models and because they saw themselves as British artists, they utilized their contacts and knowledge of other institutions in London and across the country. This placed them squarely in the national matrix. Indeed, local artists could not think of themselves as such, unless and until they could think of themselves, and be thought of as, professional artists.

⁵⁰ Bowden and Usherwood, *Art for Newcastle*, p. 29.

⁵¹ Carey, *Observations*, p. 44.

⁵² Pullan 'British Institution', p. 35.

Opposition to the Artist-Run Exhibitions

There was opposition, from some quarters, to the role Northumberland's artist-exhibitors had assigned themselves in the establishment of the Northumberland Institution. For Bowden and Usherwood the argument between the two groups rested with the fact that the opposing group- 'the intelligentsia' saw themselves as the 'scourge of villainy and incompetence in local affairs', a mission that was buoyed up by their non-conformist beliefs. Members of this group comprised, for Bowden and Usherwood, of W.A. Mitchell, the editor of the *Tyne Mercury* and *Newcastle Journal*, John Hodgson, editor of the *Newcastle Chronicle*, some members of the Newcastle Institution for the General Promotion of the Fine Arts, including T.W. Keenlyside and James Losh and more generally the group of non-conformists who worshipped in William Turner's chapel in Newcastle.⁵³ By this interpretation, such a group were opposed to Richardson and Parker's endeavours because they believed that the pair were not administering their institutions with the public good in mind. The argument is therefore characterized as one of civic good versus private interest. There is much truth in this analysis and it goes a long way to explaining the personal attacks from certain sections of the press, such as the *Northern John Bull*, which accused Parker and Richardson of running the Academy along 'partial, selfish and unproductive lines'.⁵⁴

However, this public antagonism seems primarily also to be an expression of the tensions between the artistic elite and artists over who was best suited to be leaders of public taste. As Fawcett notes of the county at large, 'that many artists ... preferred an institution run by artists ... was the ground for much local friction and sometimes open hostility'.⁵⁵ This can be seen in the way that the attacks from the 'intelligentsia' were formulated in the press and in the model which they offered as an alternative in 1831. It can also be seen in the various public responses made by Richardson and on Richardson's behalf.

The position that the 'intelligentsia', or the artistic elite, adopted is perhaps most concisely made in a letter, written to the *Tyne Mercury*, under the pseudonym 'the ghost of James Barry'. James Barry was an artist

⁵³ Many of these men are considered to have formed a group of influential gentleman scientists based in Newcastle's Literary and Philosophical Society. Interestingly, Ian Inkster describes the group as 'evidence of a virile provincialism which resentment [of the metropolis] more than emulation'. Ian Inkster and Jack Morrell (eds.), *Metropolis and Province, Science in British Culture, 1780-1850* (London, 1983).

⁵⁴ *The Northern John Bull; or, the Englishman's Magazine* 2 (1830), p. 25.

⁵⁵ Fawcett, *Rise of English Provincial Art*, p. 121.

and author who died in 1806 and who had been a passionate advocate for both the civilizing role of art and an increase in patronage as the best way to promote painting, especially an English school of history painting.⁵⁶ The letter made the case that artists were ill-suited as organizers of exhibitions, because of their economic interests. He called the committee 'neither fish nor flesh' comprising of, as it did, artists, amateurs and gentlemen.⁵⁷ For the author however, the real contest for influence over the committee was between the artists and the gentlemen, with the amateurs as pawns, serving the interests of the artists. 'I have known' he opined 'many amateurs, [and] I have always found them the same strange, inconsistent and disagreeable subjects' who were easily swayed.⁵⁸ For the ghost of James Barry, given the important role he believed an institution should play in the moral and intellectual life of society, the right leadership for such an undertaking was crucial. To his mind it was the 'independent ... gentlemen' and the 'buy [ers] [of] pictures' who would make up 'the very best committee that could be procured'.⁵⁹ In this analysis Richardson's running of the institution was undesirable *because* he was an artist. Artists, in the author's view were incapable, by the nature of their employment, of organizing such an institute for the public good. This is not evidence of a group of civic-minded locals scrutinising the affairs of local institutions, but rather an assessment of the desirable public role of artists and the artistic elite.

Attacks in the *Tyne Mercury*, *Newcastle Chronicle*, *Newcastle Journal* and *The Northern John Bull* are similar in tone. For example, the proposals put forward by the *Newcastle Magazine* for the organization of the Northern Academy, made plain that the key to success was the proper involvement of gentleman patrons and not artists. Although the magazine was careful to highlight the importance of 'the support of artists' and urged that 'the institution shall place the greatest attention to the interests of artists', it was not artists who were to be in charge.⁶⁰ The proposals sought to curb the powers of Richardson and Parker but their role was to be subordinated not to a committee of artists, nor a mixed committee of artist and patrons. Rather the proposals stated that 'subscribers ... be procured' and that the largest subscribers 'be considered

⁵⁶ In 1816 to 1817 letters under the name of 'ghost of Barry' appeared in the *Annals of Fine Art*, although there is no suggestion that the authors are the same.

⁵⁷ *Tyne Mercury*, 15 October 1822.

⁵⁸ *Idem*.

⁵⁹ *Idem*.

⁶⁰ *Newcastle Magazine* 2 (March, 1828), p. 136.

directors' and that the committee be chosen from these directors.⁶¹ This did not overtly ban artists from committee positions but skewed the odds of membership in favour of wealthy patrons. Furthermore, the proposals stated the wish that 'the institution [be] a real academy like that of the metropolis', clearly highlighting the preferred model as that of the British Institution.⁶² Indeed, the *Newcastle Magazine* believed that, what it saw as the lack artistic activity in the region, was due to the lack of patronage relative to that found in the metropolis, which meant that any talent that there was in the area 'wasted its sweetness in the desert air'.⁶³ Not only did the magazine see the lack of patronage as central to the lack of artistic activity, it also saw it as central to the idea that 'there is no taste here'.⁶⁴ Clearly, for the *Newcastle Magazine*, the problem with the management of Parker and Richardson was not their private priorities—they were to be expected as they were artists—for the magazine, only the influence of gentleman patrons could raise the levels of taste and artistic activity in the region.

The *Tyne Mercury* and the *Newcastle Weekly Chronicle* both perceived that the greatest problem the Northumberland Institution faced was its comparative lack of patronage. The *Newcastle Weekly Chronicle* described the problem as 'the comparatively humble share of patronage bestowed upon it by those whose greatest pride and boast ought to have been the sums they expended in its encouragement'.⁶⁵ The *Tyne Mercury*'s position was similar, asking: 'and why were there so small a number [of paintings] sold? Ask the patrons and all the nobility and gentry of this and neighbouring counties'.⁶⁶ However, although for the *Newcastle Weekly Chronicle* this seemed to absolve Richardson of any blame arising from the lack of exhibition sales, for the *Tyne Mercury* the institution should have been catering more to the fashions of potential patrons and bringing in the work of more London artists, stating 'the truth is most of [the patrons, nobility and gentry] ... are ... tainted with that stupid attachment to everything metropolitan'.⁶⁷

⁶¹ *Idem.*

⁶² *Newcastle Magazine*, p. 137.

⁶³ *Newcastle Magazine* 6 (Dec 1827), p. 568.

⁶⁴ *Idem.*

⁶⁵ *Newcastle Weekly Chronicle*, 11 September 1824.

⁶⁶ *Tyne Mercury*, 14 September 1824.

⁶⁷ *Idem.*

The newspaper suggested that the 'committee bestir itself'⁶⁸ and stop the institution from being the private concern of Richardson. It claimed that the institution only procured paintings through Richardson's contacts. However, this does not seem to have been the case. Thomas Sword Good was an Honorary Member who sent a number of paintings to the Northumberland Institution. It is more likely that his contributions were procured through his close friendship with Robert Bewick than with Richardson. Similarly, William Harvey, another Honorary Member had been an apprentice of Bewick's. Also, John Linnell (1792-1882) exhibited at the Northern Academy through his friendship with Northumberland Institute committee member William Dixon.

Instead, it seems that this plea was directed at the members of the committee that Usherwood and Bowden see as the 'intelligentsia', but who, in any case, later joined Mitchell at the Newcastle Institution in 1832 and who attempted to oust Richardson from the Northumberland Institution in 1827. These men were James Losh, T.W. Keenlyside, Edward Swinburne and Joseph Crawhall, the members of the institution's committee who were not artists. It was the gentleman then, rather than the artist- who was too wedded to his own economic concerns- that was the preferred candidate for the running of the exhibition in the *Tyne Mercury's* opinion. The *Tyne Mercury's* position was, however, contradictory. On the one hand, it wished The Institution to a 'valuable means of civilisation' -an arbiter of taste.⁶⁹ On the other hand, it wished it to pander to the aristocratic market. It is unlikely that the newspaper saw the market and the ideal as co-existing harmoniously, given the language in which it described current fashions. Whether it envisaged The Institution as an arbiter of taste or an aristocratic saleroom, it clearly believed that an artist was unable to effectively manage either, because, despite the language the *Tyne Mercury* used to persuade its readers that it was concerned that the institution was being run privately and that it ought to be run in the public interest, it seem more likely that it was really more concerned with the power of the artist over the institution. In that case, it over-exaggerated the role of Richardson and tried to 'bestir' those sympathetic, *gentleman*, members of the committee to stage a coup.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Idem.

⁶⁹ Idem.

⁷⁰ Idem.

The *Northern John Bull* went further than the other local newspapers and magazines in attacking Richardson's and Parker's credentials as being unfit for the purposes of running a gallery. Not only did the magazine, in one of the articles written under the synonym 'Apelles', call to 'place the management in other hands-in men whose character and *situation in life*, will be a guarantee to the public, that they have no other object than the advancement of painting'.⁷¹ Also, 'Apelles' made explicit his conception of the *local* artist, as embodied by Richardson, as a mere tradesman, unable to be an arbiter of public taste. Firstly, 'Apelles' called Richardson 'a needy adventurer',⁷² deprived of a metropolitan fine art education and secondly he considered that 'the mind [should be] unslaved by that mercenary feeling which comes when painting is considered a trade-when money rather than fame, is the object'.⁷³ For 'Apelles' not only was the artist unqualified to be an arbiter of public taste but the local artist could only really be seen as a craftsman, allotting local artists a 'specific, low, status within society as a whole and the national art world in particular'.⁷⁴ The magazine also made reference to the fact that, as *local* artists they could not even be considered as 'artists in any meaningful sense'.⁷⁵

The essence of these attacks can be seen in the way that the artistic elite chose to administer the Newcastle Institution and later the North of England Institution. Firstly, as Bowden and Usherwood note, to 'avoid [the Newcastle Institution] becoming a sale-room for the work of the town's artists the constitution debarred artists from becoming members of the management committee'⁷⁶ and set about rectifying what it saw as the 'inferior' nature of 'the taste of the public' in England.⁷⁷ At the same time the Northern Society for Painters in Watercolours, comprised chiefly of the artist members of the old Northumberland Institute, framed their constitution in such a way as to specify that 'none but artists be eligible to become members'.⁷⁸ The quote from Opie's lectures, which they chose to appear on the frontispiece of the third annual exhibition catalogue, disavowed the role of the non-artist as an arbiter of taste and elevated the role

⁷¹ *The Northern John Bull* 2 (August 1830), p. 31. Italics inserted.

⁷² *The Northern John Bull* (1829), p. 89.

⁷³ *The Northern John Bull* (1829), p. 88.

⁷⁴ Quinn, 'Picturing Locality', p. 116.

⁷⁵ *Idem*.

⁷⁶ Bowden and Usherwood, *Art for Newcastle*, p. 25.

⁷⁷ Newcastle Institute for the General Promotion of the Fine Arts, *Second Annual Exhibition of Pictures of the Newcastle Institute for the Promotion of the Fine Arts 1833* (Newcastle, 1833), frontispiece.

⁷⁸ Northern Society, *Constitutions*, p. 3.

of the professional by stating: 'in a crowd, he that talks loudest, not he that talks best, is surest of commanding attention ... but however plausible these excuses, it becomes the true painter to consider, that they will avail nothing before the tribunal of the world'.⁷⁹

Conceptions of Taste

The attempt by artists to become the key arbiters of artistic taste was not as radical a movement as one might expect. Artists were not moved by a definition of taste that was radically different from that of the *status quo*. Furthermore, this definition of taste left little room for radical definitions of local artistic identity. Quinn explains the connotations of the word 'academy' for the local press as highlighting the fact that the relationship between the local show, 'a distant satellite' and the Royal Academy, 'the excellence of the metropolitan centre', was one of emulation.⁸⁰ He also notes that the definition of success for such an academy was that it 'aspire[d] to [the] universality' which would, at least partially, prevent it from being 'tied to a [provincial] space'.⁸¹ The dichotomy between the central and the local was also applied to the positioning of artists themselves and it is this which explains the antipathy that 'Appelles' felt towards the local artist.⁸²

This conception of taste and its universal origins was shared by artists. David Dunbar, a sculptor close to the circle around the Northern Academy and later the only non-watercolourist to be admitted to the Northern Society of Painters in Watercolours, mounted an exhibition in 1831 of the works of 'foreign and British sculptors', after the Northern Academy refused to admit his sculpture *Musidora* (n.d.) on the grounds of decency.⁸³ Dunbar reassured the public in the exhibition catalogue that 'due to the importance

⁷⁹ Newcastle Society of Artists, *Third Annual Exhibition of Pictures in Watercolours and Sculpture in the Gallery of the Newcastle Society of Artists* (Newcastle, 1837).

⁸⁰ Quinn, 'Picturing Locality', p. 83.

⁸¹ Quinn, 'Picturing Locality', p.p. 83-4.

⁸² A full account of the conception of taste as universal, as opposed to provincial, is covered in Quinn's 'Picturing Locality', p.p. 115-23. Quinn's convincing interpretation is that the critic believed that artists such as John Martin, whose status as a genius had been determined by the metropolis, could concentrate on the depiction of universal themes in their work. Meanwhile, 'Appelles' cautioned local artists to concentrate on labour and the depiction of local detail, as their lack of genius de-barred them from any treatment of the universal.

⁸³ David Dunbar, *A Catalogue of Mr. Dunbar's First Exhibition of the Works of Foreign and British Sculptors, Oxford Street, New Bridge, Newcastle, with Brief Memoirs of Michael Angelo, Canova, Parks, Bacon, Deare and Nolekers, whose Works form part of the Collection* (Newcastle, 1831), n.p.

of art' he would display it at his own exhibition.⁸⁴ He then explained this importance by emphasizing the ability of art to 'correct and improve the taste', through its 'commanding and universal' influence.⁸⁵ For artists, gentlemen and patrons alike therefore the conception of taste rested on the idea of the universal and central as set against the provincial. Carey's defence of Richardson and Parker's Academy also followed this line. For him, the prime purpose of the local exhibitions was to engender a spirit of fellow-feeling and patriotism across the nation and to enliven taste where it was most needed, in short, to bring the local closer to the universal and the universal closer to the local. He noted for example, 'annual exhibitions of modern art, as a PRIMARY OBJECT TO THE NATION. They are necessary in London, and doubly so in provincial districts'.⁸⁶

Similarly, the Newcastle Society of Artists printed 'extracts from the Letter of an Artist' in its 1835 first exhibition retrospective.⁸⁷ The unnamed artist had been invited to survey, not only the exhibition, but by implication the state of art in the area. The reader was told within the first two lines, of the artist's qualifications for such a task- he was not only of 'considerable talent' but he was also based in London.⁸⁸ The author immediately highlighted the principle aspect of provincial art, by commenting that it was 'deficient in the means of Academic study'.⁸⁹ He went on to compare local art, characterized by 'the defect' of its execution, to the art of J.M.W. Turner (1775-1851), characterized as being 'as ... natural ... and poetical as ... nature'.⁹⁰ The author concluded by saying that the local artists had 'arrived at the best means of meeting the public taste' but in order for them to rise above the 'narrow minded' they needed training provided by, or similar to, the academies in Paris and London.⁹¹ For the artist author, and by implication for the Newcastle Society, local art was incapable of improving taste without recourse to the direct or indirect universal education provided in the metropolis.

⁸⁴ Idem.

⁸⁵ Idem.

⁸⁶ Carey, *Observations*, p17. Capitalization as in the original.

⁸⁷ Newcastle Society of Artists, *Remarks on Painting and Sculpture in the First Exhibition of Newcastle Society of Artists 1835* (Newcastle, 1835), p.p. 52-4.

⁸⁸ Newcastle Society of Artists, *Remarks*, p. 52.

⁸⁹ Newcastle Society of Artists, *Remarks*, p. 53.

⁹⁰ Idem.

⁹¹ Newcastle Society of Artists, *Remarks*, p. 54.

Exhibited Artwork

The local art work on display in Northumberland, in the period, sought to fill two functions. Firstly, it sought to emulate the taste for Picturesque landscapes that had filtered down from London and the Continent. Secondly, local art work was replete with local detail and views. However, unlike the Northumberland art of the later century, this local detail did not respond to, or comment upon, the social or economic conditions of the region. As Quinn notes, local artists, bound by their and their market's conceptions of taste and province, were apt to 'behave as befits the lower artist' and 'fill [their] painting with local detail' as 'value [would] not adhere to the painting from any other source'.⁹²

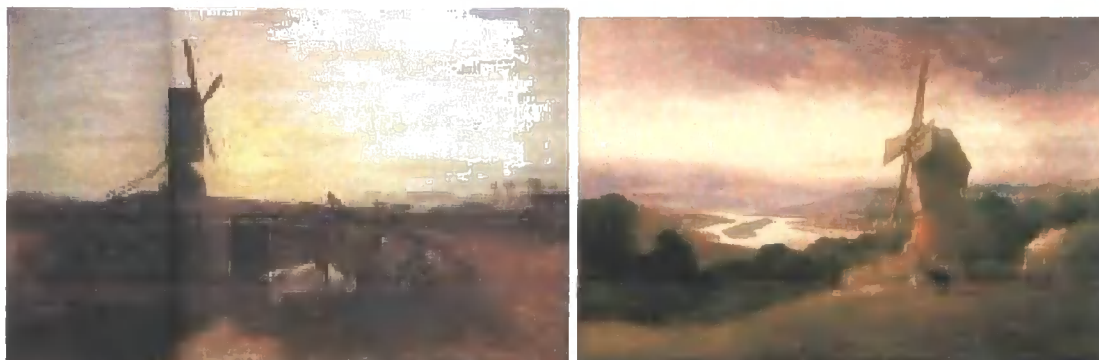
The execution of Picturesque landscape was rooted in the theories of William Gilpin and was closely linked to ideas of taste in the period, with a primacy placed on nature as the source of genius. In terms of the superficial artistic style of the Picturesque, Peter Howard characterizes it as 'concentrated on the aesthetic pleasure to be gained from roughness, from a lack of symmetry, from antiquarian ... ruins, from bridges and the pleasing juxtaposition of related objects'.⁹³ Picturesque landscape painters attempted to create paintings that were, in their entirety, truthful to nature. Accordingly, every object in an individual painting was viewed from the perspective of the whole painting and its faithful representation of nature. Of course, this did not mean that paintings were, or were meant to be, mere recordings of the visual landscape, but, by adhering to the principles of the Picturesque, the artist could hope to find the essential quality of truth in the landscape, even if this meant being highly aware of composition. J. M.W. Turner was the most famous of Picturesque landscape painters and his works such as *Dunstanborough Castle, Northumberland* (1830), showed many of the essential elements of this type of painting, from the ruins of the castle, to the stormy water and the juxtaposition of horizontal and vertical lines.

There were many landscape paintings produced and exhibited locally which showed an attachment to the Picturesque tenets of landscape painting. John Wilson Carmichael's exhibition paintings were executed in this vein. For example, *Prudoe Castle, from the Wylam Road* (n.d.) was exhibited at the Northern Academy in 1831 as was *The Abbot's House, Fountain's Abbey Yorkshire* (n.d.). Although both pieces are of north-

⁹² Quinn, 'Picturing Locality', p. 85

⁹³ Peter Howard, *Landscapes: The Artists' Vision* (London, 1991), p. 56.

eastern views, they are both essentially Picturesque paintings which happen to draw on the local landscape. The latter shows a ruin covered by trees and surrounded by a river. The former shows Prudoe Castle in the distance and in the foreground a body of water, around which cows and a dog gather. Both include representations of rural peasants at leisure. Similarly, Richardson Senior displayed many Picturesque landscapes. Usherwood and Bowden suggest that *The Tyne from Windmill Hills, Gateshead* (1818) was based on Turner's *Grand Junction Canal at Southall Mill* (1810).⁹⁴ Numerous other of his exhibited paintings were painted in a similar style, including *Barnard Castle* (n.d.), exhibited at the Northumberland Institute in 1826,⁹⁵ *The Storm, Scene at Tynemouth, Northumberland* (n.d.), which was exhibited the next year⁹⁶ and *Evening View on Heaton Dene from an Eminence near Mable's Hill* (n.d.), which was exhibited in 1831 at the Northern Academy.⁹⁷ The amateur Edward Swinburne exhibited works such as *View of La Cervara in the Appennines* (1804) at both the Northumberland Institute in 1823 and the Northern Society of Painters in Watercolours exhibition in 1831.



1.1 J.M.W. Turner *Grand Junction Canal at Southall Mill* (1810) and 1.2 T.M. Richardson Senior *The Tyne from Windmill Hills, Gateshead* (1818).

Parker, despite being a genre painter, also took elements from the Picturesque in his treatment of fishermen, pitmen and pirates, who were rendered in the same idyllic manner as in Picturesque painting. *Smugglers*

⁹⁴ Bowden and Usherwood, *Art for Newcastle*, p.p. 53-4.

⁹⁵ Northumberland Institute for the Promotion of the Fine Arts, *Fifth Annual Exhibition of Pictures of the Northumberland Institute for the Promotion of the Fine Arts 1826* (Newcastle, 1826), n.p.

⁹⁶ Northumberland Institute for the Promotion of the Fine Arts, *Sixth Exhibition of Pictures of the Northumberland Institute for the Promotion of the Fine Arts 1827* (Newcastle, 1827) n.p.

⁹⁷ *Tyne Mercury*, 9 August 1831.

Attacked (n.d.) is possibly an exception to this, as it represents the violent nature of smuggling. However, the fight in the foreground between the smuggler and the officers is mirrored in the background by the rugged cliffs and the stormy weather. Other paintings are more idyllic, such as *Cullercoats with Figures* (1828), which shows a fishing family on the coast, complete with smiling children. *Pitmen Playing Quoits* (n.d.) depicts a pitman's family in a very similar manner.⁹⁸

Furthermore, the exhibited works of local artists were little different from those of the artists who had been asked to contribute from elsewhere. For example, two of Turner's landscapes from the Swinburne collection were exhibited in 1828 and lesser-known Picturesque artists such as the Reverend John Thomas (1778-1840), exhibited paintings, such as *Fast Castle from Below* (n.d.), exhibited at the Northumberland Institute in 1826. However, London and provincial artists of note were slow to send works to the Northumberland exhibitions because sale numbers were low. Richardson blamed the reception of such works by the press as the principle cause for this.⁹⁹ However, the press' concern was that London-based artists were content to send what they saw as second-rate pictures. For example, the *Newcastle Courant* noted of the Turner watercolours at the 1828 Northumberland Institute exhibition, 'without his name they would not be noted at all'.¹⁰⁰

In terms of the art they produced Northumberland's artists were not interested in making their work distinct from that produced elsewhere. This is unsurprising given the consensus regarding the nature of artistic taste among gentlemen and also local artists. Not only did many local artists concentrate and base their works on Picturesque art, they also invited the work of similar artists from other areas, especially London and Edinburgh, to exhibit their works alongside those produced locally.

Conclusion

Northumberland's exhibitions between 1822 and c.1832 did not sell many pictures. The principle reason was, as the *Tyne Mercury* noted, the gentleman patrons who visited these exhibits were primarily interested

⁹⁸ See p. 132 for examples of Parker's paintings of fishermen.

⁹⁹ *Tyne Mercury*, 28 September 1824.

¹⁰⁰ *Newcastle Courant*, 21 June 1828.

in metropolitan works, and these were few. Local art work offered nothing different and was often seen as being a second-rate imitation of the work of more famous London artists. Indeed, Northumberland's art scene was not self-consciously different from that of artistic centres elsewhere in the country. Local artists produced work that conformed to Picturesque ideals and, although many of these works depicted local scenery, they were not 'locally-specific' in any meaningful sense of the term. This is explicable in that definitions of taste were broadly similar to those in the region as out of it, taste in its contemporary definition meant that this could not have been otherwise, because taste was universal and not provincial. For one to espouse a 'provincial taste' would have been to have admitted to having no taste at all.

It was within the artistic elite's interest to espouse such a notion of taste given that it was they who were the principle arbiters. Artists however had a subordinate role and were not yet seen by all as professionals. They could not break with this definition of taste because they relied on the patronage of the gentleman patron. This decade represented the first, but failed attempts, by Northumberland's artists to control their own artistic sales. However, given the contemporary definition of taste and the fashion for the Picturesque as a requirement for sales, artists continued to consciously emulate the styles of those from outside of the region. Northumberland's artists failed to sell because they mainly offered only works whose themes and styles derived from painters with whom they could not compete. However, they were unable to offer anything different to the local market because, while artists were unable either to claim a role as arbiters of public taste or to break out of the patronage control of the gentleman artist, the idea of producing regional or county-specific art was unthinkable.

Chapter Two

The Government School of Design, Fine Art Teaching and Regional Identity, 1842-1864.¹

This chapter examines the impact of centralized art education on the professional and regional identity of the artists who were trained in the 1840s to the 1860s at the Government School of Design in Newcastle. Joanna Innes notes that ‘from the 1830s ... much reference was made to such phenomena as “centralization”’.² Her reference is made most particularly to social policy and the popular reaction to central government initiatives such as the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act. More broadly, William Lubenow’s study of attitudes towards state intervention in the early Victorian period, characterized by a central administration ‘limited to guidance and supervision of local administrative authorities’, ends in the year 1848, with the Public Health Act.³ Similarly, Boyd Hilton notes that ‘the intention behind all this was emphatically *not* to establish a centralized bureaucratic state. But ... factors caused a movement in that direction’.⁴ It would seem, then, that as central government expanded its policy remit local communities felt this centralizing pressure most keenly and reacted ‘against bureaucratic rationalization’ with a ‘tremendous resurgence [in] ... the culture and philosophy of localism’, in the 1840s and 1850s.⁵

During a period when the principles of centralization and the growth of central administration were being established in Britain, the 1830s and 1840s were a time, according to Minihan, when ‘Englishmen never paid more reverent homage to self-help and individual enterprise’.⁶ This centralization tendency crossed from the realm of public policy to culture for Minihan in the arena of arts’ education policy, and in

¹ These dates have been chosen because 1842 was the date of the inception of the Government School of Design in Newcastle and the first head teacher retired in 1864.

² Joanna Innes, ‘Central Government “Interference”: Changing Conceptions, Practices, and Concerns c. 1700-1850’ in José Harris (ed.), *Civil Society in British History Ideas, Identities, Institutions* (Oxford, 2003), p. 59.

³ William Lubenow, *The Politics of Government Growth: Early Victorian Attitudes toward State Intervention, 1833-1848* (Newton Abbot, 1971), p. 181.

⁴ Boyd Hilton, *A Mad, Bad and Dangerous People? England 1783-1846* (Oxford, 2006), p. 604.

⁵ José Harris, *‘Private Lives, Public Spirit’: A Social History of Britain 1870-1914* (Oxford, 1993), p. 18. The work of Innes, Lubenow and Harris is only part of a much wider historiography on the ‘revolution’ of nineteenth century government. The current thinking on this topic is reflected in Hilton, *A Mad, Bad and Dangerous People?*

⁶ Janet Minihan, *Nationalization of Culture: The Development of State Subsidies to the Arts in Great Britain* (London, 1977) p. 137.

particular, the growth of the Government Schools of Design, first created in 1837.⁷ The growth of these schools therefore fitted not only into the history of public-policy centralization but also into the narrative of cultural nationalization, which saw, from the 1840s and 1850s, ‘a subterranean shift in the balance of social life away from the locality to the metropolis and the nation’.⁸ There is some difference in the exact chronology applied by Minihan, Harris, Lubenow and Innes.⁹ Minihan characterizes the Government Schools of Design as evidence for greater government control, which accords with Innes’ assertion that many historians view the 1830s as the first decade of such increased control. Hilton characterizes the 1840s as a transitional period, when, although ‘the prevailing ethos [was] in favour of local autonomy still, it [was] impossible for someone in the mid-1840s to guess how the conflict between ... centre and locality would be resolved’.¹⁰ However, Harris and Lubenow believe that the real growth of government control began to occur in the 1850s and 1860s.

Despite the difference in chronology, there is a consensus, both that increased government centralization as a phenomenon began in the mid-nineteenth century and that it was spurred on by increasing government interest in social issues, of which education was a large component. According to this reading, as Minihan indicates, the Government Schools of Design should be seen as agents of greater central government control.

The 1836 report of the Select Committee on the Arts and their Connection with Manufactures made two distinct, but related points, concerning the importance of art provision in Britain and Ireland. On the one hand it emphasized that ‘to us, a particularly manufacturing nation, the connection between art and manufactures is most important’.¹¹ On the other hand, it stressed that there should be ‘a more liberal

⁷ From 1852 it became known as the Newcastle School of Art.

⁸ Harris, *Private Lives*, p. 19.

⁹ Indeed, it is interesting to note that historians such as Simon Gunn place this cultural nationalization, at least with specific reference to middle-class identity, in the inter-war period. See Simon Gunn, ‘Class, Identity and the Urban: the Middle Class in England, c.1790-1950’, *Urban History* 31 (2004).

¹⁰ Hilton, *Mad, Bad and Dangerous People?*, p.p. 604-5.

¹¹ The Select Committee appointed to Inquire into the Best Means of extending a Knowledge of the Arts and of Principles of Design among the People, *Report Sess., 1836* (London, 1836) in Paul Quinn, ‘Picturing Locality: Art and Regional Identity in the North East of England’, unpubl. PhD thesis, University of Sunderland, 1997, p. 257.

diffusion of the enlightening effects of the arts'.¹² However, given the fears of M. P. 's about 'the economic damage that ... France might be doing to Britain',¹³ the report gave particular weight to the practical action necessary for the improvement of industrial design, rather than an emphasis on more abstract schemes to raise levels of taste.

The result of the report was a pre-emptive move by the government to establish a School of Design, based at Somerset House from 1837 to 1852, and with William Dyce as the director and secretary of the council for the first two years. The school was to teach design, rather than art, in such a manner as was consistent with the report's emphasis on practical schemes for raising the quality of industrial production. Indeed, Quentin Bell notes the distinction between the eighteenth-century Academy model of art education, based on the 'tastes of the ... dilettante in an agricultural Britain' and the needs of an industrial nation with 'no respect for the arts save that which arose from a sense of social obligation'.¹⁴ This made the practical training of the School 'directly related to industry and commerce'.¹⁵ Similarly, the school was under the auspices of the Board of Trade and it was from this body that 'real power was exercised' by financing.¹⁶ Branch schools were established from 1842 onwards.

Schools were established when existing or proposed art schools in the localities applied for government funding and subscribed to the central school's policies. This was in keeping with the Select Committee's guidance on the level of government involvement in the scheme, which envisaged that 'the imposition of the government should not extend to interference; it should aim at the development and extension of art; but it should neither force its action nor control its cultivation'. Indeed, Quinn characterizes the relations between the central and branch schools, until 1852, as echoing 'the permissive style of much early regulatory legislation', which '[allowed] the locality to assume responsibilities within the national framework [here] the locality is not required to act it is permitted to do so'.

¹² *Idem*.

¹³ Elizabeth Bonython, *The Great Exhibitor: The Life and Work of Henry Cole* (London, 2003), p. 104.

¹⁴ Quentin Bell, *Schools of Design* (London, 1963), p. 34.

¹⁵ Bell, *Schools of Design*, p. 60.

¹⁶ Bonython, *Great Exhibitor*, p. 104.

However, in 1852 when the schools were renamed schools of Practical Art and subsumed under the new Department of Practical Art, managed by Henry Cole and Richard Redgrave, Quinn perceives the schools as 'conforming to a pattern by which the modern state came to regulate and control everyday life in the locality'. Again, according to Quinn, this control was brought about by central concerns regarding 'the use to which the grant was put' by the branch schools, this turned the central administration into 'a machine dedicated to the ordering of the design education experience'.¹⁷ Indeed, Quinn goes as far as to liken the system to Bentham's Panopticon model.

Bell agrees with Quinn's analysis in essence, if not in its particulars, by characterizing the management of the central administration as operating with 'rigorous efficiency'.¹⁸ However, Bell argues that the management of the schools before 1852 was unable, but not unwilling on grounds of principle, to create an inflexibly centralized system: 'all that Cole did was to succeed in doing that which others failed to do'.¹⁹

However, despite slight differences, Quinn and Bell's analysis conforms to the idea of growing state involvement in social and especially educational affairs. Their conclusions fit the experiences of the Government Schools of Design into the inspection and funding patterns established more universally with the Revised Code on Elementary Education in 1862. In turn, these educational initiatives fit into the orthodox historiographical view regarding the growth of state control during the 1840s and 1850s with the Factory and Public Health Acts.

Increasing central control in the area of culture and the arts is a theme most comprehensively explored by Janet Minihan, who singles out the experience of the Schools of Practical Art as an example of this tendency. Minihan notes that Cole and Redgrave hoped to make the schools more economical by forcing newly established institutions to fund themselves to a greater extent. As she explains, the idea was that 'art education ... would be based on principles of self-help and voluntary initiatives'.²⁰ However, she counters this assertion by noting that whilst self-help and enterprise were widely lauded, still 'centralization and

¹⁷ Quinn, 'Picturing Locality', p.p. 250-67.

¹⁸ Bell, *Schools of Design*, p. 258.

¹⁹ Idem.

²⁰ Minihan, *Nationalization of Culture*, p. 109.

administration from London slowly, but securely, established themselves throughout the country'.²¹ Like Quinn, Minihan emphasizes the 'mechanical imitative system of art instruction' led by a central department who 'thought that they already had rules and principles enough for the entire country'.²²

The central problem with the analysis of the Government Schools by Minihan and Quinn is similar to that of Harris' analysis of more general cultural centralization. They base their studies on evidence from the central administration, especially departmental and council reports, proceedings and committee papers, as well as the papers of Henry Cole. Their analysis, therefore, whilst highlighting resistance to centralization, has the danger of emphasizing its effects. For example, Minihan doubtlessly exaggerates when she notes: 'the department effectively reduced art to a joyless exercise for thousands of children'.²³ 'Therefore, although Minihan can evoke the criticism of uniform pedagogical methods by Charles Dickens in *Hard Times* (1854), she does not explore any 'antagonism towards active, interfering government' from the teachers in the branch schools.²⁴ Bell, however, goes some way to exploring the reality of life at the branch schools and highlights some virulent opposition to central interference at the local level. For example, he notes that this opposition is seen in the Birmingham school's hostility to the central council's insistence that the school should not become a fine-art institution. It is also seen in the opposition to central policy from Manchester's drawing masters who believed that the central council had allowed the school to become a fine-art academy with its appointment of J.A. Hamersley in 1849.

The centralizing ambitions of both Somerset House and central government were not therefore always fully achieved and there was a degree of hostility towards them from the branch schools who wished to maintain a degree of independence. As Minihan suggests, the trend towards greater centralization, if not nationalization of culture, may well have been under way, but the transition was more problematic throughout the 1840s, 1850 and 1860s than the historiography has allowed. In the case of the Newcastle School, a strong-minded headmaster and governing body as well as limited outside interference eventually led to the school producing a number of professional artists. In keeping with the general historiographical

²¹ Minihan, *Nationalization of Culture*, p. 137.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 136.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

work on the art school scheme, including that on the Newcastle school has focused on the centralizing tendencies of mid-Victorian governments and the continuing, but decreasing, ability of local agencies to resist such pressures. However, the history of the Newcastle school is ill-fitted to this pattern because central governmental control over the school was undermined by a number of factors, especially before 1852 when practical design teaching was the principle aim of the central school authorities. Firstly, there was a lack of interest from outside agencies in the school. The economic situation of Newcastle meant that there was little local need for training in industrial design, and even those firms that created decorated items, such as William Wailes' glass factory, were reluctant to use the school as a training resource for their workmen. Because of this, as the teaching of manufacturing design was the principle aim of the central administration, the Newcastle school was seen by the central administration as the least important of the branch schools. In addition, local subscriptions and donations to the school waned during the period as it had no clear practical aim.

With the lack of interest in the school, it was able to develop in a manner which best suited the aims of its headmaster and the North of England Society. These aims were fixed at art, rather than design, teaching. One important reason for this was the priorities of the school's first headmaster, William Bell Scott. The rebellious attitude of Scott meant that the Newcastle school's policies often differed from those espoused by the central administration, especially before the 1852 reforms, which were more in keeping with Scott's own priorities. This was especially the case when it came to fine art and perspective training, which the central school was determined, should not be provided and Scott was determined to deliver. It was also the case with Scott's attitude towards the teaching of art principles, which differed from the guidance provided by Richard Redgrave at Marlborough House. Furthermore, the teaching priorities of Scott and his successor William Cosens Way (1833-1905) created an art school which was both destined to teach aspiring *professional* artists. This agenda was in sympathy with the aims of the North of England Society, despite the central administration's belief that 'the political complexion of the Newcastle committee was in total accordance with that of central government'.²⁵

²⁵ Quinn, 'Picturing Locality', p. 263.

If the chief area of disagreement before 1852 between the central and branch school is seen in terms of design teaching set against art teaching and not central control against local independence, then the situation after 1852 can be seen in a different light. Quinn notes that after 1852 central power was re-organized so as to render the Newcastle school unable to keep any independence. However, in contrast to this, the 1852 reforms actually gave the Newcastle school greater official freedom, by allowing them openly to teach art as opposed to design. In consequence of this, the rebellious nature of Scott was tamed in the post-1852 period, not because of irresistible central control, but because of a broad agreement over teaching aims. This harmony can also be seen in the high regard and good relationship between Scott and Henry Cole, the new Director of the Department of Practical Art. Indeed, on the rare occasions when Scott criticized central administration dictates after 1852, as in his published lecture series, it was over the issue of the effective teaching of the fine arts.

The Newcastle school taught many of the most important artists in turn-of-the-century Northumberland and more importantly, it created, by design, *professional* artists. This group was different from the artists who preceded them. Firstly, they were trained at a time and in an institution, which gave a greater status to artists than ever before in the locality. Secondly, unlike the generation of Richardson and Parker, they were trained as a group determined by their geographical location and as such they had greater professional ties to the locality, and to each other.

The status of artists as professionals was therefore enhanced by the school, but their status as *local* artists was also enhanced. Scott was keen to encourage in his pupils a sense of county specificity and even pride in their work. This can be seen in the way Scott customized the travelling Government Art Exhibitions to include local works. Similarly, Scott's most famous work was his commission for Lord and Lady Trevelyan on the history of Northumberland, which Scott encouraged his pupils to view.

The Newcastle school created a generation of artists who saw themselves as professionals. These artists had strong local connections and a sense of pride in their county's heritage and history. The most important aspect of the history of the Newcastle school was its commitment to the teaching of art and the connections it formed between aspiring professional artists in the region. Growing centralization is part of the story, but

even in other schools who were subjected to greater central influence, many of the arguments were over the importance of art teaching. However, the Newcastle school would not have been financially viable without central support. In this regard the increasing efforts at centralization by the government, served to strengthen, rather than diminish, local cultural independence.

This chapter will proceed with an examination of the historiography specifically relating to the Newcastle School, which characterizes the institution as a key centralizing force in the arenas of art and culture.

Contrary to this, the rest of the chapter will examine the activities of the school, in such a way as demonstrates its independence. This independence was achieved firstly because of its relative unimportance to the central administration, secondly through the attitude of the North of England Society, who applied for the government grant, and thirdly because of the attitude of the school's first headmaster. Contrary to central dictates the Newcastle School became a centre of fine art teaching and a training ground for many of the county's notable artists. Just as the school became a cradle for professional artists, the artistic work of the headmaster, of which many pupils were made aware, also inspired in many of them a sense of the importance of 'the local' and county heritage, in their art.

Lack of Government Interest in the Newcastle School Before 1852

The central administration was keen to help the North of England Society turn their exhibition and teaching academy into a Government School of Design in 1842. The principle reason was that the administration believed that because 'Newcastle was the centre of a large and populous district with manufactures in glass and metals' it was 'likely to benefit from the proximity of a School of Design'.²⁶ However, the council had overestimated the need for such an industrially-focused school in the area. The glass works could, theoretically, have benefited from such an institution, however, as in Birmingham and Manchester, manufacturers believed that the patent and competition implications for designs conceived at the school, did not outweigh their benefits. As one School of Design report noted of Newcastle 'on the part of the local

²⁶ Vera Walker, 'The Life and Work of William Bell Scott 1811-1890', unpubl. PhD thesis, University of Durham, 1951, p. 78.

authorities and manufacturers, zealous interest ... might ... make it [the school] more available to the commercial welfare of the community'.²⁷

One of Scott's first tasks was to tour the largest of Tyneside's stained glass factories- that of William Wailes- who Scott explained, 'wanted no more education among his workmen than they had', 'he did not find workmen with art knowledge or proclivities desirable' and in any case 'he knew what his customers wanted'.²⁸ In any case, 'industries such as those of stained glass and pottery production were insignificant compared with the design industries of other towns with art schools'²⁹ and 'it was stretching credibility to claim that there was an indigenous and major industry relying on design skills'.³⁰ Even Wailes' factory, one of only two such factories in the Tyneside area by 1858, had only been established five years prior to the opening of the Newcastle school and as such could hardly been seen as an established firm. By 1850 the firm only employed 75 craftsmen, which, although a large number for such a young firm, was, on its own, hardly enough to justify the existence of a design school. Similarly, iron and steel manufacture, as well as the engineering industry, were in the 1850s, in their infancy in Tyneside and only ever had a minimal impact on employment in the rest of Northumberland. In any case, as Scott noted 'what did they care for drawing and design'.³¹

Textile design had been singled out by the 1849 Select Committee Report as a sector in which design teaching was necessary, especially as the numbers of registered designs in the textile industry was so high. In 1845 6,531 textile designs were registered in Britain whereas only 256 designs were registered for glass, wood, hardware and metal combined.³² In Northumberland employment in the textile and clothing industries accounted for only 0.89% and 2.79% respectively of the adult male population in 1851 and this

²⁷ School of Design, *Fourth Report of the Council of the School of Design: for the Year 1844-1845 from May 1844 to June 1845* (London, 1844), p. 30.

²⁸ William Minto, (ed.), *Autobiographical Notes of the Life of William Bell Scott* (London, 1892), p. 189.

²⁹ Quinn, 'Picturing Locality', p. 264.

³⁰ Quinn, 'Picturing Locality', p. 263.

³¹ Minto, *Autobiographical Notes*, p. 192.

³² House of Commons Select Committee on the School of Design, Thomas Milner Gibson, *Report from the Select Committee on the School of Design: Together with the Proceedings of the Committee* (London, 1849), p. 485.

figure was in decline.³³ In the Newcastle and Tynemouth areas this percentage was higher, but still the largest occupational group was involved in construction, which did not need artisans with art education. Indeed, secondary-sector employment levels in Northumberland were amongst the lowest in the country and by the mid-1850s they were on a par with Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire, which had also suffered a marked decline in their textile sectors similar to that in Northumberland.³⁴

By 1849 the central administration had come to see the disadvantageous positioning of the Newcastle school and the 1849 Select Committee Report came to consider the Newcastle School 'the least important of the schools'.³⁵ Indeed, from the perspective of aiding manufacturing design it is easy to see why the administration saw fit to discontinue the grant between 1849 and 1850. Of the 106 students attending the school in 1849 32 were unemployed, this was the largest single group and probably comprised many female pupils. The second largest group was that of engravers and chasers, which comprised only 10 pupils and then glass painters and cutters which accounted for only nine. Of textile workers, the group which the Select Committee singled out for particular attention, there was none. Neither were there any involved in pottery, an occupational group which had supplied so many pupils in the Stoke and Hanley schools thanks to the support of the Mailing firm.³⁶ In Birmingham the numbers of pupils employed in trades likely to benefit from such training was higher. Of the 310 students there were 26 japanners, four decorative painters, 14 architects, 13 engravers, and six carvers and engravers.³⁷ In a letter from the Newcastle school to the central administration, the school asked for its grant to be restored, citing its achievements in the aiding of local manufacturing. However, the list only included a few such achievements. It stated that 'of the youths involved in paper staining two have begun to make designs under their respective employers' and the rather vague boast that 'some men have ... received beneficial engagements'.³⁸

³³ Peter Kitson, *The Male Occupational Structure of Northumberland, 1762-1871: A Preliminary Report* (Cambridge, 2005), p. 8. at www.geog.cam.ac.uk/research/projects/occupations/abstracts, accessed 12 January 2007.

³⁴ L. Shaw-Taylor and E.A. Wrigley, *The Occupational Structure of England c.1750-1871: A Preliminary Report* (Cambridge, 2005), p. 24. at www.geog.cam.ac.uk/research/projects/occupations/abstracts, accessed 12 January 2007.

³⁵ Gibson, *Report from the Select Committee*, p. 41.

³⁶ Gibson, *Report from the Select Committee*, p. 494.

³⁷ Bell, *Schools of Design*, p. 106.

³⁸ Committee of the Newcastle School of Design to Right Hon. T. Milner Gibson 19 June 1848 in Gibson, *Report from the Select Committee*, p. 454.

Similarly, the numbers of pupils attending the Newcastle school did not compare favourably with those of other schools. According to the estimates of the 1849 Select Committee there had been, on average, 83 students enrolled at the Newcastle school from 1842-1848, this was the second lowest enrolment record of any of the schools. The nearest annual attendance figures to those of the Newcastle school were at the Sheffield school, which saw an average of 87 pupils between 1843 and 1848. There was then a large jump in the levels of attendance between the Sheffield and the fourth smallest school. In Norwich the average was 123 pupils between 1846 and 1848 and the schools in the larger cities of, for example, Manchester and the Spitalfields School in London, had much larger enrolment numbers. Indeed, Newcastle's enrolment figures were higher only than that of York's school, which was both regarded as an anomaly to the principles of the central administration, teaching, as it did, mostly genteel women. It was also situated in a much smaller city than Newcastle. Bell notes of the York school: 'at the time the cathedral town contained no large industrial enterprises of any kind' but it was built because 'Etty [a member of the governing council] had set his heart on having a school in his native town'.³⁹

Interest in the Newcastle school was, by 1849, waning in the Northumberland region as well and not just amongst the manufacturers. The amount of money coming into the school from donations and subscriptions had been in steep decline from 1838. The annual total for 1838 was £552 6s 6d. By 1844 this was £127 11s 6d and by 1848 it was £101 7d. Scott noted in his autobiography that even when he arrived at the school, 'the rent had not been paid for many seasons ... [and] half the subscribers had dropped off'.⁴⁰

Before the reforms instituted by Henry Cole in 1852, interest in the school, from manufacturers, from the central administration and from the local community was low and in decline. As such, few at the central administration, few involved in manufacturing and few donors had a vested interest in making the school work in their favour. Whereas schools such as that in Manchester came into fierce conflict with the central administration, for example the argument over teaching between the head teacher Zephaniah Bell and William Dyce, in his role as inspector, Newcastle's experience of central inspection was much less

³⁹ Bell, *Schools of Design*, p. 125.

⁴⁰ Minto, *Autobiographical Notes*, p. 178.

confrontational, despite the fact the Scott did not much conform to central policy either. Indeed, the provincial school inspectors seem to have seen the transgressions of the Newcastle school as much less serious as those of, for example, Manchester or Birmingham. Bell wrote of the inspections of 1852: 'never more shall we see him [Ambrose Poynter, the inspector] wagging his head at our honoured board'.⁴¹ Poynter's actions did not however, induce too hostile a reaction from the Newcastle committee. As Bell goes on to say: 'never more shall ... our dear old chairman express the heretical doubt whether these visits ... are really of much use'.⁴²

The early life of the Newcastle school, at least until 1852, was marked by outside indifference. The fact that the school was ill placed to serve the needs of the industrial community and that, in any case, local manufacturers showed no interest in the school, meant that the central committee became indifferent and this partly contributed to the decline in local subscriptions and donations. This indifference meant that Scott and the North of England Society were able to pursue their own policies with little outside interference.

The Newcastle School's Commitment to Fine Art Teaching

Walker notes of Scott's attitude towards the North of England Society that he believed that: '[they] were in the wrong in so far as they had appealed to the Central Council for financial help ... and to obtain it had knowingly given a false impression that they agreed with the Government policy'.⁴³ There seems to be much truth in Scott's allegation. At the fifth annual meeting of the North of England Society in 1842-the meeting in which the offer of government support was read and approved-the society boasted of its achievements over the previous year. These betrayed a commitment to the teaching of mechanical and fine-art teaching that was in no way conversant with the aims of the government scheme. Firstly, it was stated that a teacher called Harrison had began two classes in geometry, projection and perspective, one for artisans and the other for gentlemen. Secondly, Oliphant was teaching a drawing class, both for those involved in 'ornamental design' and for those 'drawing from the splendid models of antiquity'.⁴⁴ Most

⁴¹ William Bell Scott to William Michael Rossetti 28 March 1852 in Walker, 'Life and Work of William Bell Scott', p. 93.

⁴² *Idem*.

⁴³ Walker, 'Life and Work of William Bell Scott', p.p. 81-2.

⁴⁴ *Newcastle Weekly Chronicle*, 10 December 1842.

strikingly, given the imminent acceptance of the government's terms, a landscape painting class was envisaged for the near future. Although this was not strictly forbidden, given that the Government insisted that 'the Society make the School of Design, their principle, and if required by the council their sole object', ⁴⁵ it does not suggest that the society was 'in total accordance with [the political complexion] ... of central government'. ⁴⁶ Indeed, the issue of private fine-art classes was to remain contentious until the 1852 reforms.

Furthermore, Hutt, the member of the society who had taken on the bulk of the negotiations with the government, acknowledged that the School of Design scheme had not been popular with the society. He remarked 'on the first proposal ... the project ... was considered a very questionable subject ... often treated with ridicule and contempt'. ⁴⁷ However, this hostility did not seem to have sprung from a dislike of government 'interference', as when Hutt asserted that 'art and design deserved ... the co-operation of the council and the state' he was met with applause. ⁴⁸ That it was hostility to design teaching and not government involvement that had led to the society's general hostility is demonstrated in the speech Hutt gave to the society to persuade them to accept the scheme. His speech focused on the financial stability that the £150 per annum, promised by the government, would give to the school and the importance of the casts that would also be sent, especially because of the expense and difficulty of the society purchasing them on its own.

If the committee of the society were committed to art teaching then so was Scott. Walker talks of his 'rebellious attitude' towards the central administration and comments 'that he seems to have understood very well what was wanted in Newcastle, what it was in his power to give and how he might set about organizing practical details'. ⁴⁹ Scott himself also noted that 'the London Board ... provided me with a printed table of rules ... I hung up the rules and broke them by my own practice.' ⁵⁰

⁴⁵ School of Design, *Report of the Council of the School of Design 1842-1843* (London, 1843), p. 12, quoted in Walker, 'Life and Work of William Bell Scott', p. 79.

⁴⁶ Quinn, 'Picturing Locality', p. 263.

⁴⁷ *Newcastle Weekly Chronicle*, 10 December 1842.

⁴⁸ *Idem*.

⁴⁹ Walker, 'Life and Work of William Bell Scott', p. 91.

⁵⁰ Minto, *Autobiographical Notes*, p. 123.

Scott was not in sympathy with the early teaching methods prescribed by the pre-1852 central administration. Given that their priority was to aid industry, their central philosophy was that the schools should focus on the teaching of design. Similarly, as Scott himself explained, 'fine-art students were strictly excluded [from the schools]', as the administration did not want to compete with local fine-art teachers.⁵¹ Scott disagreed, both that the schools' curriculum should limit itself to the teaching of design and that the schools should be forbidden to teaching budding artists. Furthermore, he was censorious of the view that the schools should focus primarily on the teaching of design and he believed that the teaching rubric was stifling in this regard. He noted that 'one [rule] ... was that no one intending to follow any of the arts professionally was admissible as a student, and another that drawing the human figure was interdicted. I am not inventing absurdities'.⁵²

The 1852 reforms took the teaching focus away from teaching of a specifically design-orientated nature. From this point onwards the curriculum shifted the focus to the teaching of ornamental art principles, which was in greater harmony with Scott's beliefs. Even so, even after 1852 Scott was still hostile to the central administration when he believed that fine art and the role of the artist were under attack. After he had retired from the Newcastle school he wrote in an article for the *Fortnightly Review* that 'the standard of *artistic* excellence among the students' of the schools needed to raise and that 'of late years there is little freedom and originality'.⁵³ Scott was also hostile to the administration's plans to have all future teachers trained through the schools, because, as he saw it, artists were the only group qualified to teach, even ornamental art principles and furthermore 'none but the artist can be expected to teach the human figure with any effect'.⁵⁴ Furthermore, as he wrote to Lady Trevelyan in 1857 'people always ask can these students turn their acquirement to any practical end? ... In Newcastle to no end at all ... [but] they are made every way abler by this development of powers and resources within themselves'.⁵⁵ Pauline Trevelyan noted in her diary that: 'he thinks it [the school] is doing good, but in the way of general

⁵¹ William Bell Scott, 'Ornamental in England' *Fortnightly Review* 46 (1870), p. 402.

⁵² Minto, *Autobiographical Notes*, p. 178.

⁵³ Scott, 'Ornamental Art', p. 408. Italics inserted.

⁵⁴ Scott, 'Ornamental Art', p. 404.

⁵⁵ William Bell Scott to Lady Trevelyan 27 March 1856 TP, Letters of Pauline Trevelyan, NUSC.

improvement in taste, not of training designers for the manufactory. He says he never recommends young men to design for manufacturers for they are so ill paid'.⁵⁶

Just as Scott believed that there should be room for the 'academic teaching' of art⁵⁷ so he believed that schools should not be punished for competing with private art schools. Scott noted that Richardson had complained to the Board of Trade that Scott's school was 'talking the bread' from local teachers'.⁵⁸ He also recorded his shock at the fact the Board 'remonstrated with me for doing what I had actually been appointed to do'.⁵⁹ He was also scathing of Richardson's teaching style, concluding that it constituted 'a false position' that the 'Government Schools of Design was established ... to revolutionize'.⁶⁰ Here, however, Scott was being disingenuous as academic teaching was in neither his, nor the schools', remit and it is unlikely that the central administration saw the schools' role in quite the same way as did Scott. What is clear however is that he saw the role of the school as partly enhancing the standard of pictorial art in the area and his role, as an artist, to carry this out to best effect.

Scott was equally adamant that the school should have greater freedom to teach 'scientific knowledge of perspective, projection [and] geometry' as well as 'mechanical drawing', the interdiction of which he attributed to 'an ignorant hatred of art' among 'Englishmen of that day'.⁶¹ Scott, with a typically rebellious attitude, 'engaged a master of these branches', adding 'yet I had to keep the students attending these classes out of the table of returns made monthly'.⁶² There is however some dispute over this affair. As Bell notes, reports on the branch schools for the year ending July 1850 stated that Scott had failed to institute a mechanical drawing class, despite requests to do so from the central administration. However, there is no reason to distrust Scott's story as, in a speech to students in 1859, Scott asserted that 'geometry and

⁵⁶ Lady Pauline Trevelyan, *Diary, Volume Thirty Two*, quoted in Batchelor, *Lady Trevelyan*, p. 102.

⁵⁷ Bell, *The Schools of Design*, p. 123.

⁵⁸ Minto, *Autobiographical Notes*, p. 180.

⁵⁹ *Idem*.

⁶⁰ Minto, *Autobiographical Notes*, p. 280.

⁶¹ *Idem*.

⁶² Minto, *Autobiographical Notes*, p.p. 179-80.

mechanical drawing should form an integral part of our system ... we should know the detail before we know the whole'.⁶³

Scott's Relationship with the post-1852 administration

Scott was much happier under the post-1852 administration as it gave greater stress to the teaching of ornamental art. He also admired Henry Cole, noting: '[he was] a man with a firm hand [and] a perspective judgment' and indeed Scott became personal friends with Cole.⁶⁴ His attitude to the new administration was summed up by his comment that 'I ceased to be humiliated by my connection' to the central authorities,⁶⁵ although he still believed that 'I would willingly make many alterations'.⁶⁶

One of the few areas over which there was disagreement between the central administration and Scott after 1852, was the teaching of principles, and this was because the stress Richard Redgrave at the central administration, placed on principle teaching, harmed, in Scott's view, his ability to teach art and artists. However, in keeping with Scott's belief in academic teaching, he was convinced of the need to teach principles as well as practice. Nevertheless he believed that the schools' curriculum and put undue stress on this aspect of teaching. Scott's main concern was to produce, as best he could, pupils with both a sound grasp of theory and a capacity for originality.

It was his belief in the teaching of principles that led him to disagree with John Ruskin, whom he called a 'professed analyst'.⁶⁷ He did not mean this description to be complimentary and his intense dislike of Ruskin is well documented. On visiting the Working Man's College in London, in which Ruskin taught, he noted scathingly the practice of copying directly from nature: 'everyone was trying to put, on small pieces of paper, imitations by pen and ink, of pieces of rough sticks ... a frightful waste of time ... everything to be seen in academic or Government School of Art practice-ignored'.⁶⁸ Indeed on one occasion when both

⁶³ *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 24 February 1859.

⁶⁴ Minto, *Autobiographical Notes*, p. 181.

⁶⁵ Minto, *Autobiographical Notes*, p. 330.

⁶⁶ William Bell Scott to Lady Trevelyan 8 October 1856, TP

⁶⁷ William Bell Scott to Lady Trevelyan 25 July 1853, TP

⁶⁸ Minto, W. (ed.), *Autobiographical Notes of the Life of William Bell Scott Volume Two* (London, 1892), p. 10.

Ruskin and Scott were guests of Lord and Lady Trevelyan at Wallington Hall, Scott had publicly remonstrated with Ruskin for teaching his fellow guests to draw furniture from sight, which Scott believed was useless, indeed counter-productive, without grounding in the principles of perspective. His attempt to discredit Ruskin's teaching methods backfired however and, he scathingly reports, that the guests only glared at him in contemptuous silence.

However, Scott resisted too heavy a concentration on principle teaching and it was this that brought him into conflict with the central administration. He believed that an undue stress on principles 'repress [ed] originality and [made] patient hands only'.⁶⁹ Scott's lecture series, in which these criticisms were made, was first given to senior pupils at the school and was later published as a collection which sold one hundred copies in a six-month period and went into a second edition.⁷⁰ In it he made plain his dislike of such teaching, commenting that 'to speak of [beauty and taste] will lead me into the danger of dogmatizing, of teaching *principles*, and of laying down the law for the future development of your abilities ... as artists'.⁷¹ He went on to say that 'a too rigid inculcation of principles binds the student'.⁷² Bell suggested that the correct balance was to be struck by 'their occasional illumination in the examples in the hands of the student, there being always reasons, then being easily made obvious, for their application'.⁷³

The School as a Cradle for Professional Artists

Scott undoubtedly had many conflicts of opinion with the central administration, especially before 1852. However, other than noting Scott's small rebellions, such as the inception of the mechanical drawing class and the fine art classes, which brought censure from Richardson Senior, the degree to which he was able to run the school independently is questionable. Though the formal school documents from the central administration regarding the Newcastle school makes this difficult to assess, it may be reasonably supposed that Scott did pursue some of his own fine-art policies, especially before 1852. Bell notes that 'the schools did not go very far in the direction of the teaching of fine art. There were voluntary art classes in many

⁶⁹ William Bell Scott to Lady Trevelyan, 8 October 1856, TP

⁷⁰ William Bell Scott to Mr. Budden, n.d., James Leathart Fonds, University of British Columbia, Special Collections.

⁷¹ William Bell Scott, *Half-hour Lectures*, p. 299. Italics as in original.

⁷² *Idem*.

⁷³ *Idem*.

provincial establishments and in particular we may suppose that Newcastle, York and probably Sheffield attempted to give academic instruction. But in nearly every school the teaching was of so elementary a nature that a decided advance ... was difficult'.⁷⁴ However, in the case of Newcastle at least this assessment of the school's ability to teach fine art is underestimated. For example, Henry Hetherington Emmerson (1831-1895) who studied at the school from c. 1844 to 1846, not only became a noted artist, but 'Scott is said to have taken a special interest in Emmerson, and ... tutored him for some two years'.⁷⁵ Bell also suggested that after 1852 'the long-standing question' of private classes in places like Newcastle was solved by their being officially sanctioned, so that the function of the schools were split between the practical teaching given to workman and the art teaching given to the gentry.⁷⁶ However, Robert Jobling (1841-1923) enrolled in the school, as a ship painter and soon after his time at the school he decided to become a professional artist, so one can assume that there was some degree of fine-art teaching even for those in trades.

Indeed, many artists who made their name in the later part of the century were pupils at the school, either under Scott, his successor William Cosens Way, or both. These included, Ralph Hedley (1848-1913), who was tutored by both men, Emmerson, Robert Jobling, George Washington Brownlow (1835-1876), Stephen Brownlow (1828-1896), George Blackie Sticks (1843-1900) and John Charlton (1847-1917), who studied under Scott. Sticks was an apprentice at Wailes' glass factory, but, given Wailes' attitude to the school and the fact that Hall comments 'he delighted in his studies ... but cared little for stained glass work', it seems unlikely that he was given a practical, rather than fine art education.⁷⁷ George Brownlow (1835-1876) studied at the school until the age of 20 and was noticed by a future patron, Rev. J St Clare Raymond, because he had won a gold medal for his work in 1855, again this suggests that the school was rather more interested in training artists than artisans. Similarly, Stephen Brownlow studied at the school after a general education and became a professional artist after completing his studies. William C. Irving (1866-1943), John Hodgson Campbell (1855-1927), also an apprentice at William Wailes' factory, and Thomas

⁷⁴ Bell, *Schools of Design*, p. 134.

⁷⁵ Hall, *Artists of Northumbria*, p. 118.

⁷⁶ Bell, *Schools of Design*, p. 250.

⁷⁷ Hall, *Artists of Northumbria*, p. 118.

Dickinson (1854-c.1902) were tutored by Cosens Way, as was Wilson Hepple (1853-1937), as Way was a visiting art master at his school.

Local Identity at the School

Scott's involvement with the students at the Newcastle school fostered an appreciation for local landscape and history. For example, by Scott's direction, the travelling exhibitions organized by the central school were always supplemented, as happened in other places, with the work of local artists and pieces from local collections. His most important contribution to the artistic appreciation of the county was, however, the fact that he painted many pictures of the locality, the most important of which was the cycle depicting Northumberland's past, which was painted for Wallington and displayed at Newcastle's Literary and Philosophical Society. These exhibitions and Scott's paintings were seen by many of the Newcastle students and, as John Batchelor notes, 'some of his pupils ... became noted ... artists whose work demonstrates the ... influence of Bell Scott's teaching'.⁷⁸ The paintings were both an illustration of progress and of regional history, facets that were influenced by both Lady Pauline Trevelyan's interest on the civilizing aspects of Christianity and Sir Walter Trevelyan's interest in country history and realism. The manner in which the paintings were displayed individually in Newcastle, before they were hung at Wallington, meant that it was as a history of Northumberland that they were most easily read by the students of the Newcastle School. Indeed, it was this facet that inspired many such aspiring artists in their later careers.

Scott's Wallington paintings of Northumberland are notable for two reasons. Firstly, the paintings illustrate progress towards civilization, in its industrial and moral forms. Secondly, they are representative of Northumberland's history, and were researched and composed in such a way as to render the scenes as accurately and realistically as possible, in keeping with Pre-Raphaelite principles. It is difficult to marry these two facets together in the paintings, without making one the principle concern and casting the other in a subordinate role. Historians have tended to focus on one of these facets and have used it to explain the character of the paintings in isolation. It is as a cycle about progress that the works are most often seen. To

⁷⁸ Batchelor, *Lady Trevelyan*, p. 109.

this end the last of the paintings, *Iron and Coal* (1861), is often given prominence. As Paul Usherwood comments 'it is always discussed within a metropolitan historical framework'.⁷⁹ Usherwood explains this by commenting that most of the historians and art historians who have examined this work are 'metropolitan and southern' and as such see the work as 'provincial'.⁸⁰

Usherwood himself redresses the balance by acknowledging and exploring the painting's 'part in the production of ideas of "northernness"'.⁸¹ He goes on to sub-divide the ways in which 'southern' critics see the work as either a 'Pre-Raphaelite modern life picture'; in the way that Francis Klingender does when he emphasizes the influence of Ford Maddox Brown's *Work* (1865) on the painting, noting that it presents a fascinating view of Tyneside;⁸² and as an 'acceptable image of the Industrial Revolution'.⁸³ This dichotomy is a false one however, and viewing the cycle as a paean to progress, these two aspects may be conflated. Indeed, if one is to consider the service to which Pre-Raphaelite realism is put, it is not only in the rendering of modern life, which is only the subject of one painting, but in the rendering of Northumberland history as a whole. The two differing aims which the paintings were to serve were that of realistically representing the history of a county and representing an abstract idea of progress.

The two aspects are so difficult to reconcile because, despite the universal messages in the paintings regarding the civilizing influence of Christianity⁸⁴ and the benefits of industrial progress, the cycle does not use Northumberland as a cipher for the history of England, as it is the peculiarities of the county on which the paintings dwell. Indeed, these peculiarities are seen in their own right, not as examples of diversity of custom in the country as a whole, especially as most of the paintings set out of doors are located at sea or at the shoreline and *Building the Roman Wall* (1857), the only one which is not, is set on the border with Scotland. Scotland is again represented in the Chevy Chase scenes which were painted on

⁷⁹ Paul Usherwood, 'William Bell Scott's *Iron and Coal*: Northern Readings' in Laing Art Gallery *Pre-Raphaelites: Painters and Patrons in the North-East* (Newcastle, 1996), p. 39.

⁸⁰ *Idem.*

⁸¹ *Idem.*

⁸² Francis Klingender, *Art and the Industrial Revolution* (London, 1968), p. 178.

⁸³ *Idem.*

⁸⁴ To see this message one only has to compare the destruction wrought by the heathen invaders in *The Descent of the Dames* (1857) and the tranquillity in the scenes of the Christian saints Cuthbert and Bede.

the upper story of the hall. The county is therefore depicted as an isolated hinterland for the most part and not as part of England to any great extent.

It seems as if the aims of the cycle- the progress of the modern world and the history of Northumberland- sat together uncomfortably because they were the peculiar aims of Lady Pauline in the first instance and Sir Walter in the second. Although these paintings were executed by Scott, it was the influence of his patrons, Lady Pauline, who Scott admired greatly and the irascible Sir Walter, which prevailed. Scott's letters to the Trevelyans constantly cast the artist in a subordinate role. The painting of the heads of Northumberland worthies set between the main paintings were inserted because Sir Walter insisted Scott replace the 'horrible masks' he had planned,⁸⁵ Scott wrote to Sir Walter, 'if you could decide the head for the second place ... I could have a spandrel done and put up for your return'.⁸⁶ In similar tones he wrote to Sir Walter in 1860 to ask, 'would it be quite convenient to pay me for last year's pictures?'⁸⁷ Scott was, on occasion, to play a subordinate role, not only to the Trevelyans, but also to their friends, on the matter of the paintings. This is particularly notable with regards to the models for *The Spur in the Dish* (1859). Scott had originally envisaged Sir Walter to be the model for the central figure but when he refused, William Charlton, a friend of the family, was enlisted. Scott wrote to Sir Walter in 1858 seemingly to get Sir Walter's help to reign in Charlton's enthusiasm for modelling 'Mr. Charlton has been unwearingly about the "Spur in the Dish". At one time he brought in 3 men, 1 lady and a dog all at once [sic] ... very likely he did not know what the expense had been ... as I have always to pay models'.⁸⁸ As Batchelor notes, 'courteous disagreement about Bell Scott's work characterizes much of what Pauline and Walter said to him, and to each other ... in these contests the artist himself always came third'.⁸⁹

While Scott was reduced to making suggestions for his own paintings, Sir Walter and Lady Trevelyan seem to have envisaged the scheme quite differently from each other. Their attitudes can be summarized in the way Batchelor characterizes their responses to Holman Hunt's *A Converted British Family Sheltering a*

⁸⁵ Batchelor, *Lady Trevelyan*, p. 114.

⁸⁶ William Bell Scott to Sir Walter Trevelyan, 11 November 1856, T. P.

⁸⁷ William Bell Scott to Sir Walter Trevelyan, 13 July 1860, TP

⁸⁸ William Bell Scott to Sir Walter Trevelyan, 21 November 1858, TP

⁸⁹ Batchelor, *Lady Trevelyan*, p. 112.

Christian Priest from the Persecution of the Druids (1850). Pauline, who had almost converted to Catholicism, was attracted by the emphasis on the 'civilizing effect of Christianity'. She also noted that it 'prompted the kind of detailed debate over historical accuracy that Sir Walter [a noted authority on Northumberland history] enjoyed'.⁹⁰

The historical accuracy and realism in the paintings was, to a large extent, at Sir Walter's behest as well as being in keeping with Scott's Pre-Raphaelite sympathies. When Sir Walter objected to the interior setting for *Bernard Gilpin* (1859), Scott reminded him that to place the scene outdoors would be to contradict the historical record and at this Sir Walter relented.⁹¹ Similarly, when Sir Walter objected to a picture of Armstrong's armaments Scott reminded him that, 'if a painter was illustrating low life in London he could not ignore the gin palace, the same as in illustrating the manufacturing industry of the Tyne ... if you were writing or having written a History of England would you omit the greater part of it?'⁹² With this argument Scott eventually had his own way on this issue as well. Faithfulness to the detail of Northumberland's history in these pictures was in constant evidence and it went hand-in-hand with the Pre-Raphaelite inspired realism, which, as a keen amateur photographer, Sir Walter prized. Indeed, the landscape painting was carried out by Scott on site.

Attention to detail can be seen, for example, in *Saint Cuthbert* (1856), where there is an eider duck, which is rarely found in other areas of the country. Similarly, Charlton brought what he believed to be the legendary spur to be used in *The Spur in the Dish*. According to Vera Walker 'clothing, jewellery, furniture, were all studied from and sought after by Scott and Sir Walter',⁹³ indeed, for *Building of the Roman Wall* Scott arranged for 'a piece of the wall [to be sent] by rail ... so that I should have a portrait of a veritable individual stone in my foreground'.⁹⁴ Indeed, as homage to the accuracy of the work Dr Bruce, the leading authority on the wall, was used as a model for one of the soldiers.

⁹⁰ Batchelor, *Lady Trevelyan*, p. 118.

⁹¹ William Bell Scott to Sir Walter Trevelyan, 24 February 1859, TP

⁹² William Bell Scott to Sir Walter Trevelyan, 28 March 1860, TP

⁹³ Walker, 'Life and Work of William Bell Scott', p. 116.

⁹⁴ William Bell Scott to Lady Pauline Trevelyan, 12 March 1857, TP

In fact, the use of the ‘right’ models was always an important consideration for both Scott and Sir Walter, and Scott wrote many letters concerning the accuracy of the figures depicted in the medallions. Furthermore, they felt it important to use local models so that the character of Northumberland could be expressed both in the depictions of landscape and in the depiction of its people. Therefore, Charlton was well suited to be the model for the chieftain in *The Spur in the Dish*, especially as some accounts of the legend, and in some versions of the ballad, the family involved were ancestors of the Charltons. Similarly, Batchelor ventures that Scott was so exacerbated by the large number of models made available to him and in some cases thrust upon him because ‘Northumberland families were rooted, very old and all related to each other, and he [Scott] wanted to convey this’, by the repeated use of the same models across pictures.⁹⁵



2.1 Wallington Hall.⁹⁶

Lady Pauline seems to have envisaged the cycle rather differently, as a series of works illustrating ‘progress’ more generally. Scott wrote to Lady Pauline in 1861 of *Iron and Coal*, ‘do you think that these men strike from six to six ... just for the game or as roistering borderers took to the north? ... the amount of money now necessary to be gained and the difficulty of gaining it ... is the characteristic of the day’.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Batchelor, *Lady Trevelyan*, p. 138.

⁹⁶ See p. 114 for *Iron and Coal*.

⁹⁷ William Bell Scott to Lady Pauline Trevelyan, (undated), TP

Lady Pauline was as convinced as her husband about the value of depicting Northumberland and clearly also believed in a distinctiveness of character, but Scott's reply also shows her faith in the positive effects of progress, over the negative aspects of the age. She quoted Scott's words approvingly, ⁹⁸ in *The Scotsman* in 1850, 'our own age ... is the last and the best: the product of any former does not answer the wants of this'. ⁹⁹ Although Walker sees the inclusion of *Civilisation* (1866), the sculpture by Thomas Woolner, in the hall with the paintings, as included so as to be 'effective by contrast', ¹⁰⁰ Batchelor, rather more convincingly, views the inclusion of the sculpture as 'self-explanatory: the Romans, the Danes, the boarder reviers and the industrial strength of the Victorians have led to this perfect human being reared by this perfect mother'. ¹⁰¹

The two visions, Sir Walter's and Lady Pauline's, therefore sat side by side in the pictures in a way which is not contradictory but which would be difficult to reconcile if one is to attribute the artistic vision of the works to a single artist. However, Sir Walter's preoccupations were perhaps easier to appreciate by viewers, being, as they were, less abstract. The effect of Sir Walter's preoccupations enhanced by the way the paintings were first exhibited on Tyneside-one by one after each was completed-in the Literary and Philosophical Society, next door to Scott's school. ¹⁰² It is also true that some of Scott's pupils were invited to see the pictures hung at Wallington and there seems to have been a clamour for the expedition. Scott wrote to Lady Pauline that 'there is an agitation among some of the senior students to form a trip to Wallington ... there will be 12 or 13 perhaps ... some ladies ... and the best four or so of the young men in the evening class'. ¹⁰³ In the event there were 27 students therefore 'as the time approached the applicants increased and the intrigues for admission rose to boiling-over point'. ¹⁰⁴

⁹⁸ Batchelor, *Lady Trevelyan*, p. 135.

⁹⁹ *The Scotsman* 6 April 1850, quoted in Batchelor, *Lady Trevelyan*, p. 135.

¹⁰⁰ Walker, 'Life and Work of William Bell Scott', p. 114.

¹⁰¹ Batchelor, *Lady Trevelyan*, p. 125.

¹⁰² Indeed, the paintings seem to have become popular on Tyneside. In William Bell Scott to Lady Pauline Trevelyan, n.d., TP, Scott mentions that he has seen a life-size placard of his Wallington work on the Roman Wall, outside in the Haymarket area of Newcastle.

¹⁰³ William Bell Scott to Lady Pauline Trevelyan, 2 May 1860, TP

¹⁰⁴ William Bell Scott to Lady Pauline Trevelyan, 10 June 1860, TP

Scott does not record what the pupils thought of his paintings and although he mentions an attachment to the letter of 10 June, listing the names of the attendees, this has been lost. However, in 1860, the later famous Northumberland artist Ralph Hedley was a student at the school, studying in the evening class and Scott believed him to be ‘a steady, persevering, well conducted youth’, so it is possible Hedley was invited on the trip.¹⁰⁵ Similarly, Robert Jobling attended the classes and so may also have been to Wallington that day. Millard notes that these two painters and Henry Hetherington Emmerson, who had finished at the schools some years before Hedley arrived, were influenced by Scott who had ‘a lasting effect on each of them’, not only in the encouragement of the ‘Pre-Raphaelite stipple technique’ but also because he ‘set them an example of the use of local subject matter’,¹⁰⁶ as, no doubt did Cosens Way, who also taught Hedley and who painted many local scenes himself, such as *Whitley Steps* (n.d). Indeed, Hedley, Jobling and Emmerson all concentrated on scenes of local life and work throughout the majority of their careers.

The influence of Scott and of his successor was not confined to the pupils of the Newcastle school. Way was particularly active in his teaching role, working at North Shields and Newcastle Grammar School as well as at the art school in Sunderland, although no records remain for these institutions. The responsibility for art teaching at the National Schools transferred to the Schools of Art in 1852 and so Scott taught pupils at the National School in Newcastle. Although his direct influence was confined to the city, the influence of his teaching was felt across the area. When ‘a workman down at Shields’ decided to set up ‘a little school of design of his own’ it was to Scott he wrote, asking advice on Pre-Raphaelite principles.¹⁰⁷

Usherwood is correct in his assertion that Scott’s Wallington work has not been sufficiently regarded as work of Northumberland history. Although Lady Pauline injected the idea of progress on a wider scale into the pictures, it was the realism and faithfulness to historical accuracy, which was most evident in the paintings, especially when they were viewed separately. Furthermore, students were given easy access to Scott’s work, as well as to the exhibitions he helped to organize, containing local work and the works of

¹⁰⁵ William Bell Scott to Messers Thompson and Co., (n.d.), quoted in John Millard, *Ralph Hedley: Tyneside Painter (1848-1913)* (Newcastle, 1990) p8.

¹⁰⁶ Millard, *Ralph Hedley*, p. 8.

¹⁰⁷ Batchelor, *Lady Trevelyan*, p. 108.

local collectors. Indeed, on his retirement from the school it was a picture of Newcastle's *New Castle* (n.d) that was commissioned from subscriptions of the pupils and the community. Although the precise impact of Scott's local paintings had on the future artists of the region is unclear, it seems that, given the character of their later works, he did influence these painters and this influence extended to an appreciation not just of the locality, but more specifically the county.

Conclusion

Despite the general conclusions of historians such as Innes and Lubenow and the more specific conclusions attached to the Government Schools, evidence from the Newcastle school does not suggest that antagonism between the local branches and the central administration was based on power play between central and local forces. Rather it seems that such antagonism as there was, was based on a disagreement over the principle objects of the school, namely whether they should be practical or fine art institutions. Newcastle's headmaster and the North of England Society were interested in offering some fine-art teaching and they were able to pursue these interests, not without some hostility from the central administration, but with little interest. This freedom from outside interference, based on a general indifference, was compounded by the lack of attention paid to the school from the local manufacturers and subscribers, such as they were. Furthermore, although Bell and Quinn agree that the administration was repressive under Cole and Redgrave the attitude of Scott and the behaviour of the Newcastle school seems to suggest that the new administration gave the school more freedom to pursue its own fine-art agenda. Taken all in all the school was relatively free to pursue such an agenda both before 1852, when the institution was characterized by outside indifference and after 1852 when the embargo on such teaching was lifted.

As such the Newcastle school was interested in teaching aspiring professional artists. However, as there is a lack of sources regarding the day-to-day running of the school how this was undertaken is unknown.

However, what can be said is that voluntary classes for amateurs interested in art were run from the earliest date, with some success, as were classes in mechanical drawing and perspective. Moreover, the classes for workmen, which, even after 1852, were supposed to concentrate on practical art teaching, encouraged some workmen to become artists.

Furthermore, works such as those in the Wallington Cycle celebrated the history of the region in such a way as was intended to be historically accurate, by bring to bear Pre-Raphaelite principles and Sir Walter Trevelyan's love of historical truth. The pupils at the Newcastle school had an opportunity to view such works, indeed they were encouraged to do so and the effect seems to have been to inspire future artists to also paint their locality, especially their county, as many went on to do. The history of the Newcastle School of Design, and later Practical Art, should not therefore be seen as an attempt to bring stronger central control to the area, the result of which being greater cultural nationalization. On the contrary, it should be seen as an attempt to teach fine art in the area, the result of which being the first generation of professional painters in Northumberland who were bound together by a shared education and who were all similarly imbued with a sense of the importance of county in their art.

Chapter Three

The Artistic Elite and Local Artists, c.1878-1883. ¹

The aim of this chapter is to re-interpret the controversy surrounding the Arts Association's exhibiting policies as evidence of a growing regional and cultural self confidence. Such historiography as there is on this specific subject sees the decline of this institution as evidence of a decline in the elitist agenda of such exhibiting societies. Furthermore, it sees the hostile reaction to the association- because of its limited space for local art- as evidence of the beginnings of a 'democratization' of painting, which eventually made art cheaper and easier to interpret by those with no specific art training. In such an analysis the failure of the Arts Association is seen through the prism of class. The more general historiography of the period continues to assert, for this as for the preceding decades, the growth of national and centralized forms of artistic culture, not only in the case of the growing importance of London to artistic training over Continental training for British artists, but also in the search for an 'English' identity in art. Although the issue of national identity in specific works will be left until chapter four, this chapter will demonstrate that the collapse of the Arts Association was a triumph of the 'local' over the 'national' and a symptom of the growing self confidence of local professional artists and that this began to happen precisely at the time when the growth of 'English' art identity supposedly has its roots.

In September 1878 the first exhibition of the Arts Association opened in Newcastle. Its committee comprised of wealthy local businessmen and gentry and its patrons were largely aristocratic. The exhibitions of the association, between 1878 and its close in 1882, oscillated between loan exhibitions in the spring, including an Old Masters' exhibition in 1880 and Modern Art exhibitions in the autumn, where local artists' work was usually eschewed for that of artists from other parts of Britain and the Continent. The association disbanded in 1882 because of financial losses. During its brief life it courted much controversy, especially in 1879 when many local artists had their submissions declined in favour of the

¹ Letter from 'An Amateur' in *Newcastle Daily Journal*, 12 September 1879. These exhibitions conceived of 'local' in different ways. For example, members of the Tynemouth Art Club, who exhibited at the Oddfellows Hall in 1883, comprised mostly of artists from Tynemouth and the immediate surroundings. However, the exhibition held at the Winter Garden in Tynemouth in the same year was called the 'Northumberland, Durham and Northern Counties Exhibition'.

work of London artists, leading to a flurry of letters to the local press. From the first year of the Arts Association's existence, there were other exhibitions with different focuses in the area, including those held at The Central Exchange Art Gallery in Newcastle, The Fine Art Gallery in North Shields, Hollymount Hall in Bedlington, the Winter Garden in Tynemouth, Gateshead's Literary, Scientific and Mutual Improvement Society and Oddfellows Hall in North Shields, which all housed exhibitions, between 1878 and 1883, that concentrated, often explicitly, on the work of local artists.

The Middle Class and Exhibitions

Various analyses of the failure of the Arts Association have seen its decline in class terms. John Millard notes that 'this was a period when a suppressed antagonism seemed to be always present between Tyneside industrialists and their workers, and the Arts Association had inadvertently mirrored these larger tensions'.

² Although Laura Newton takes a slightly different angle, her analysis still rests on class antagonism as the reason for the association's failure: 'the elite will abandon any process which becomes too democratic ... the abandonment of the A.A. [sic] could be seen as just such a withdrawal by the elite ... faced with the increasing strength of the local body of artists and their supporters'. ³ Both contrast the undoubted wealth of the association's committee and patrons and their preference for established artists, with the artisans of the local art world and the low position of local art, as Newton notes: 'those with the least cultural capital tended to buy works of subjects familiar to them-local scenes and people'. ⁴ Indeed, Newton characterizes the acquisition patterns of the local patrons who loaned works to the Arts Association and other venues as forming a 'paradigmatic shift towards a middle-class hegemony' which formed 'a middle-class cultural dominance which helped to integrate the working classes into the cultural hegemony of capital'. ⁵

Putting such institutions in the light of class relations in Victorian urban environments is hardly novel.

Many works which have been influenced by Marxist analysis, as has Newton's to a certain extent, see the late-nineteenth century exhibition society and art gallery as an 'ideological instrument', either in the hands

² John Millard, *Ralph Hedley: Tyneside Painter (1848-1913)* (Newcastle, 1990) p. 20.

³ Laura Newton, 'The Cullercoats Artists' Colony c.1870-1914', unpubl. PhD thesis, University of Northumbria, 2001, p. 59.

⁴ Newton, 'Cullercoats Artists' Colony', p. 35.

⁵ Newton, 'Cullercoats Artists' Colony', p.p. 35-6.

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⁵ Newton, 'Cullercoats Artists' Colony', p.p. 35-6.

of the state or in the hands of the middle class.⁶ Similarly, Marxist and 'new art historians', such as Carol Duncan, have asserted that: 'society itself was a kind of building [art gallery], with a "material" base and "ideological" superstructure, and that through history the development of the former set definite limits upon, and shaped, the latter'.⁷

However, such historiography offers slightly different conclusions as to who was in charge of such institutions. Newton sees the Arts Association as an 'elite',⁸ which, in terms of art connoisseurship, gave way to 'increasingly broad-based middle classes' in Newcastle's art world.⁹ For Newton, the activities of the Arts Association 'served to maintain the philanthropic interests of the local collectors ... [and] reminded the public (their workforce) of how public spirited they could be'.¹⁰ Dianne Macleod notes that the Arts Association comprised of 'the local business class', which was 'unusually close knit'.¹¹ This seems similar to Newton's analysis, however, Macleod's definitions of the classes involved with the association are at times ambiguous. She calls men such as Isaac Lowthian Bell, on the Arts Association's committee, 'middle class' and defines this 'in its widest social sense to apply to individuals not born into the aristocracy or gentry'.¹² Macleod therefore sees the association as part of a broad middle class and a small business class, without giving a clear indication of which identity was most important in the activities of the association. However, Macleod repeatedly refers to a 'cultural elite'¹³ whose position is conferred by their being 'private collectors'.¹⁴ Macleod's characterization of the association's activities therefore fundamentally differs from Newton's in that her elite were a cultural elite whose business or class position has afforded them that position. Newton's elite are a class elite, who use their collections to further their class interest.

⁶ Carol Duncan, quoted from unknown sources in Barlow, Paul and Todd, Colin, (eds.) *Governing Cultures: The Art Institution in Victorian London* (Aldershot, 2000).

⁷ Jonathan Harris, *The New Art History: A Critical Introduction* (London, 2001), p625.

⁸ Newton, 'Cullercoats Artists' Colony', p. 59.

⁹ Newton, 'Cullercoats Artists' Colony', p. 238.

¹⁰ Newton, 'Cullercoats Artists' Colony', p. 22.

¹¹ Dianne Macleod, 'Private and Public Patronage Victorian Newcastle', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 52 (1989), p. 205.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 188.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 189.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

These subtle differences of, and vagaries in, definition and interpretation are mirrored in the wider historiography. Giles Waterfield notes that art galleries, from the 1870s onwards, represented ‘established bourgeois culture: a generally declining aristocracy played no part in their formation’.¹⁵ Michael Harrison notes of the Manchester Art Museum that although such enterprises ‘pre-supposed middle class pre-eminence’ they were nevertheless ‘based on the notion of cultural unity’.¹⁶ Alison Smith characterizes the management of the early years of the Tate gallery as a ‘compromise between the interests of the state and entrepreneurial capitalism in the matter of promoting British art amongst a democratic audience’.¹⁷ The use of class as an explanatory tool in the issue of art institutions is, therefore, useful but far from definitive. All of these interpretations assume a middle-class culture was promoted through the art institutions, at least if only by the fact that those in charge of such galleries were middle class under a broad and often unclear definition. Furthermore, there is often the explicit or implicit assertion that this middle-class culture was actively promoted in order to prompt ‘moral self-examination’ amongst the working classes.¹⁸

National Art Identity and Exhibition

Corbett, Holt and Russell assert that ‘the years following 1880 were a time when the rediscovery of national identity ... prevailed ... [this was] Englishness ... in the British Isles’.¹⁹ This corresponds with Krishan Kumar’s assertion that ‘there was a “moment of Englishness” ... at the end of the nineteenth century’²⁰ which replaced a broader British cultural identity during the early century, at a time when the confidence in Britain’s place at the head of an empire had meant that there was ‘no English nationalism, just as there was no Scottish nationalism, because there was no need for it’.²¹ Other historians have suggested that national identity, in its British or English forms, in art and culture was so fixed by the end of

¹⁵ Giles Waterfield, (ed.), *Art for the People: Culture in the Shums of Late Victorian Britain* (London, 1994). Italics added.

¹⁶ Michael Harrison, ‘Art and Philanthropy: T.C. Horsfall and ‘The Manchester Art Museum’ in Alan Kidd and K.W. Roberts (eds.), *City, Class and Culture: Studies of Social Policy and Cultural Production in Victorian Manchester* (Manchester, 1985), p. 142.

¹⁷ Alison Smith, ‘A “State” Gallery? The Management of British Art during the Early Years of the Tate’ in Paul Barlow, and Colin Trodd (eds.), *Governing Cultures: The Art Institution in Victorian London* (Aldershot, 2000), p. 187.

¹⁸ Shelagh Wilson, ‘“The Highest Art for the Lowest People”: the Whitechapel and other Philanthropic Art Galleries, 1877-1901’ in Barlow and Todd, *Governing Cultures*, p. 184.

¹⁹ David Peters Corbett, Ysanne Holt and Fiona Russell (eds.), *The Geographies of Englishness: Landscape and the National Past 1880-1940* (New Haven, 2002), p. xi.

²⁰ Krishan Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 176.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

the nineteenth century that it was being used to allay the fears brought about by modernization. As Andrew Stephenson argues: 'as part of the impact of modernisation ... there was a destabilisation of traditional ... gender identities' in 'the second half of the nineteenth century' and 'given the circumstances it was important to distinguish between English and other constructions' of masculinity.²²

In terms of art galleries, class and national identity converge in the historiography at this time of supposed cultural centralization and the beginnings of English cultural identity. As Waterfield notes 'the values of these new institutions [galleries and art museums] were those of established bourgeois culture ... serving as an element of the structure of metropolitan power'.²³ Paul Barlow and Colin Trodd also comment of 'the common claim that Victorian culture is "middle class" in character', that: 'this issue is bound up with ... whether there is a specifically "British" school of art'.²⁴

According to the historiography therefore, the rise of an English cultural identity, by an increasingly culturally homogenized middle class, left little room for expressions of local identity amongst this group. Indeed, it also supposedly allowed little local identity amongst the working class whose 'culture' was seen in terms of absence by contemporaries or as equally homogenized by historians such as Shelagh Wilson, who points to the later ready reception of Hollywood.²⁵ As Dianne Macleod concludes 'smaller communities [such as Manchester] do not produce vernacular values'.²⁶

Indeed, the idea of the growth of a nationalized culture necessarily equating to a weakened local culture is made explicit by Simon Gunn who notes of the Edwardian and inter-war period that the 'development of a mobile, national upper middle class and ... the concentration of key ... cultural institutions in London

²² David Peters Corbett and Lara Perry, *English Art 1860-1914: Modern Artists and Identity* (Manchester, 2000), p. 131.

²³ Waterfield *Art for the People*, p. 35.

²⁴ Colin Trodd and Paul Barlow, 'Constituting the Public: Art and its Institutions in Nineteenth-Century London' in Todd, *Governing Cultures*, p. 14.

²⁵ See Wilson, 'The Highest Art for the Lowest People'.

²⁶ Dianne Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class: Money and the Making of Cultural Identity* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 99.

[meant that] ... the distinctive bourgeois culture became history'.²⁷ However, Gunn's distinctive culture is little more than a civic culture which sought to glorify itself by the appropriation of high-status art and architecture, as constructed in the metropolis. As he notes: 'the most spectacular ... manifestations of provincial culture ... were the public pageants', Gunn's first example of which were those to commemorate 'Royal coronations'.²⁸ Tristram Hunt similarly points to the decoration of Northampton's Town Hall in 1864, noting that 'below the ground floor windows were a series of heraldic shields representing ... civic leaders' but that this was combined with 'the construction of a civic narrative [in the decoration] with events including ... the execution of Mary Queen of Scots'.²⁹ In terms of the accepted historiography then the Arts Association is best seen as the attempt of a middle-class elite both to display a civic pride rooted in national norms and to 'educate' their social inferiors in an artistic taste which was recognized in the metropolis and was produced by English, or British artists which celebrated 'the nation'.

This chapter will, firstly, consider the experience of the Arts Association from its opening in 1878 until its closure in 1882. The association's experience fits into much of the existing historiography. Its committee comprised an economic elite, it attempted to foster civic pride with its work, it looked to fashionable London artists to exhibit English scenes and it sought to engender a sense of 'taste' amongst the people of Northumberland.

Secondly, the chapter will focus on criticism of the Arts Association over the 1879 sale exhibition, for which many local artists were rejected. It will demonstrate that the two sides to this debate were not determined by class or by the rejected artists' place of residence. The argument was however carried out primarily over issues of self interest between the rejected artists and their friends on one hand and the association's need to make a profit on the other. Nevertheless, the debate also showed how far Northumberland's art world had shifted over the era, as local artists now felt confident enough to criticize the patrons' right to assume the role of public arbiter of taste.

²⁷ Simon Gunn, *The Public Culture of the Victorian Middle Class: Ritual and Authority in the English Industrial City 1840-1914* (Manchester, 2000), p. 197.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

²⁹ Tristram Hunt, *Building Jerusalem: The Rise and Fall of the Victorian City* (London, 2004), p. 190.

Thirdly, the chapter will consider the reasons for the collapse of the Arts Association after only four years. This section will specifically explore whether the failure of the association was due to a greater appreciation of local art by potential exhibition goers, a democratization of art which led to a greater appreciation of familiar scenes, or a reaction against the elite of the association, all of which have been forwarded in the literature. It will be suggested that issues of class and appreciation of local art have been overplayed and that the association failed for more incidental reasons of finance and administration.

Fourthly, the chapter will turn to the exhibitions of other local venues, who were often more keen to display art by local artists and to focus on depictions of local scenes. This section will argue that these exhibitions were not catering for a different social class of exhibition attendees and neither were they working in direct ideological competition with the Arts Association. Indeed, there was some overlap of organization and exhibitors between the association and other venues. This section will however, demonstrate that such exhibitions catered for a large interest in local scenes and local artists, which fitted alongside interest shown in the work of the Arts Association.

The Character of the Arts Association Exhibitions

The work of the Arts Association fits well into the accepted historiography. The committee who controlled the association were, as Macleod indicates, members of the artistic and cultural elite. Furthermore, this elite was interested, to a certain extent, in imitating the success of other northern regions and their art exhibition records. The committee of the association did look to the metropolis for the artists they wished to display, they tried to display artists popular in the capital and the landscape and cityscape scenes they displayed were largely of English sites. However, the historiography suggests that *some* such exhibitions had, as at least part of their purpose, a desire to 'educate' the less knowledgeable in the matter of artistic taste. There was a partially didactic element to the work of the Arts Association, however the language in which this was expressed suggests that the association's intended audience was the region at large rather than specific class elements within it.

The association's executive committee were part of Newcastle's financial elite and were mostly allied to business in the town in some way. On the executive committee Charles Mitchell (1820-1895), was a shipbuilder, Alexander Stevenson (1848-1918) and Jacob Burnett (c.1877-1822) were chemical manufacturers, John George Sowerby (1850-1914) was a glass manufacturer, James Leathart (c.1836-1898) was a lead manufacturer. On the general committee, Isaac Lowthian Bell (1816-1904) was a steel manufacturer who was worth £534,780, 56 at the time of his death,³⁰ William Pattinson (c.1859-1935) was a chemical manufacturer, Hilton Philipson (n.d.) was a solicitor and Edward Joicey (b.1859) was a mine owner. Indeed, most committee members had between four and seven servants, Charles Mitchell had 18, Edward Joicey had 15 and Alexander Stevenson and William Woods (b.1834) eight each.³¹

A wish to create exhibitions which would engender civic pride was clearly part of the association's aims. Indeed, nearly all of the exhibition catalogues make reference to the aim in some way. In the preface to the exhibition notes to the first exhibition in 1878, William de Brailsford noted that 'nearly all the large towns in the North of England have one after the other, contributed their quota to the advancement of Art ... in the shape of picture galleries ... Liverpool, Manchester, Edinburgh and Glasgow have all come to the fore ... Is Newcastle to be content with exclusion from the realms of art?'³² Similarly, the preface to the loan exhibition of the following year stated: 'it is believed that the present exhibition ... exceeds in quality anything of the kind previously attempted in Newcastle'.³³ Similarly, the Notes on the Principle Pictures section of the 1879 sale exhibition catalogue boasted of the 'gigantic success' of the previous year's exhibition and the other 'exhibitions of pictures all over the district', summarizing that 'Richardson would never have dreamed' of such an appreciation for art.³⁴

³⁰ Geoffrey Tweedale, 'Isaac Lowthian Bell' in Lawrence Goldman (ed.), *Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2007), at www.oxforddnb.com, accessed on 12 February 2007.

³¹ This figure came from the census records for the 30 men mentioned as committee members of the Arts Association between 1878 and 1882. Servant numbers for 21 of these could be found.

³² Arts Association, *Exhibition Notes with Seventy Illustrations by H.H. Emmerson, R Jobling, Jos. Crawhall Jun., and J.G. Sowerby* (Newcastle, 1878), p. 5.

³³ Arts Association, *Loan Exhibition 1879* (Newcastle, 1879), p.p. 6-7.

³⁴ Arts Association, *Notes on the Principle Pictures Exhibited by the Arts Association, Newcastle-on-Tyne, Autumn 1879* (Newcastle, 1879), p. iv.

The efforts of the association to bring art to the area were always linked to the growth of art appreciation in the country at large. In the 1878 catalogue, the association's plan to 'throw down the gauntlet' for the spread of art in the area, was likened to the challenges that the nation had faced in catching up with its Continental neighbours in terms of art display.³⁵ De Brailsford opened the preface by alluding to the 'thrice-told tale' of 'the progress ... in the Fine Arts in this country ... of late years'.³⁶ Despite the fact that the story was, by his own admission, well known, de Brailsford takes two pages to reiterate the successes of the National Gallery, the Great Exhibition and the Royal Academy, concluding that 'Art in Great Britain seems no longer contented to be a laggard in the race with other countries'.³⁷ The notes that accompanied the exhibition of autumn 1879 put the numbers attending the previous year's exhibition in the light of Whistler's comments that the general public was incapable of appreciating art. The notes asserted that 'if Mr. Whistler's opinion is worth anything ... the persons who visited the Newcastle exhibition ... would get as much enjoyment out of a gallery of waxworks'.³⁸

The association sought to put its attempt at raising appreciation for art in the area in the context of similar national moves and indeed there was an attachment to non-local art. Despite the fact that the autumn exhibitions were open to local entrants, as well as those from further afield and despite the fact that the association had agents in Glasgow and Edinburgh as well as London, most of the artists who displayed at the sale exhibitions were based in London. At the 1879 sale exhibition 136 contributing artists were based in London and only 27 were from Northumberland and Tyneside and 17 from Scotland.³⁹ The 1879 exhibition caused a storm of letters to the local press because of its seeming bias against the works of local artists, but other exhibitions showed a similar, if not as skewed, composition. The 1882 exhibition displayed works from 143 London-based artists, whereas only 83 Northumberland and Tyneside artists and 22 Scottish artists had their work displayed.

³⁵ Arts Association, *Exhibition Notes*, p. 6.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

³⁸ Arts Association, *Notes on the Principle Pictures*, p. iv.

³⁹ Figures taken from the list of contributors in Arts Association, *Autumn Exhibition 1879* (Newcastle, 1879), p.p. 47-59.

As well as relying on their contacts in London to supply much of the art they displayed, there was also a move to exhibit artists who were fashionable or renowned in the capital. The notes which accompanied the 1879 sale exhibition highlighted, as prominent pictures, works by James Aumonier (1832-1911), John Everett Millais (1829-1896), Henry Moore (1831-1895), William Beattie (1831-1909), Clara Montalba (1842-1929) Gilbert Munger (1837-1903), Charles Napier Hemy (1841-1917), John Mogford (1821-1885), Cecil Lawson (1851-1882) and Walter Crane (1845-1915). These were not only noted painters, but many were particularly celebrated between 1878 and 1882. For example, Cecil Lawson, who had had paintings rejected from the Royal Academy's annual exhibitions more than once in the 1870s, displayed seven works at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1879, including one that had been rejected by the Royal Academy, an incident which was highly unusual for the artist. James Aumonier, a regular exhibitor at the Arts Association, was elected a member of the Royal Institute of Painters in Watercolours in 1879. In 1881 Millais, obviously an already famous painter, held the largest exhibition of his life, a retrospective of 20 paintings at the Fine Art Society on Bond Street. Similarly, late in 1879 Gilbert Munger, the American landscape painter, sold his *Herring Boat* (n.d.), which had been displayed at the Arts Association that year, for £450 at Bonhams.⁴⁰ Lawrence Alma-Tadema (1836-1912) also exhibited at the Arts Association sale exhibition in 1879, as well as in 1879 and 1880. The years 1879-1882 were also especially important for his career. In 1879 he became a Royal Academician and in 1882 a retrospective of 185 of his paintings were displayed at the Grosvenor Gallery.

However, this bias was practical as well as ideological and was partly due to the way in which the works were procured. Although there were agents, the committee were heavily involved in inviting artists to submit. For example, Joseph Crawhall was instrumental in procuring many of the London artists to submit by invitation and his family scrapbook contains correspondence between the committee and Claude Calthrop (n.d.), William Lawson (n.d.), James Aumonier (1832-1911) and Charles Keene (1923-1891), with whom Joseph Crawhall was close friends. Furthermore, some of those artists who had been invited to submit suggested others who could be invited, William Lawson proposed that his sister, Octavia Composto

⁴⁰ Michael D. Schroeder. *The Paintings of Gilbert Munger* (n.d.). at. www.d.umn.edu/tma/MungerSite/Frames.html. viewed on 15 March 2007.

(n.d.), who 'has exhibited in Paris' be allowed to exhibit, as she did in 1879.⁴¹ Similarly, Charles Terrot was to send work purchased in Newcastle to the sale exhibition of 1878, but in a letter to the committee he also offered to send some of his pictures by amateurs, 'if you are anxious to procure [them]'.⁴²

Not only were the Arts Association's executive committee keen to exhibit the works of famous and fashionable artists based in London, in the landscape and cityscape scenes exhibited by the association, there was a preponderance of English scenes over pictures of Scotland, Wales, the Continental and Northumberland. For example, in 1882 there were 117 pictures displayed which portrayed places in England outside of Northumberland. By contrast there were 50 Continental scenes, 39 Welsh and Scottish scenes and only 37 Northumberland scenes. At the smaller 1879 sale exhibition, over which there had been so much press controversy for omitting the works of many local artists, there were 71 English scenes, 23 Continental scenes, 22 Welsh and Scottish scenes and only 19 depictions of Northumberland. The Arts Association positioned itself as an English exhibition society, whose relationship to Northumberland was only important as an expression of a wider national identity.

The Arts Association clearly felt it had a duty to 'educate' the audience for its exhibitions in matters of taste. However, the language by which this desire was expressed suggests that the association saw the Northumberland locality at large as its audience and not specific classes within that locality. The aim which the association expressed as its *raison d'être* in a letter from Joseph Crawhall to the *Newcastle Daily Journal* was: 'the development and encouragement of local art, and the formation of a School of Artists for Newcastle-upon-Tyne'.⁴³ Artists in the area were therefore supposed to benefit from the work of the Arts Association. However, given that the association became infamous for rejecting the works of many local artists, one can only assume that they were meant to benefit only by the development of 'a taste for art generally' which the exhibitions were meant to confer.⁴⁴ This is borne out by the fact that following the

⁴¹ William Lawson to Joseph Crawhall, 30 August 1878, Crawhall Family Scrapbook Vol. II, Newcastle Central Library.

⁴² Charles Terrot to Arts Association Committee, 20 July 1878, Crawhall Family Scrapbook Vol. II, NCL.

⁴³ *Newcastle Daily Journal*, 2 September 1878.

⁴⁴ *Idem*.

1879 exhibition, when many local artists' work was refused, the association offered cheap membership to art students of both Northumberland and Durham.

Similarly the Notes on the Principle Pictures, included in the 1879 sale exhibition refuted the claim made by Whistler that 'none but painters are capable of understanding pictures'.⁴⁵ The association claimed that taste was generally improving because of exhibitions such as its own, noting: 'good pictures have become more accessible to the public ... vulgar people still have a love for vulgarized art; but their appreciation is at least a much higher character than once it was ... it is sufficiently satisfactory that an advance in [the right] direction is being made'.⁴⁶ In relation to the association's didactic purpose the essay concludes that: 'a body like the Newcastle Arts Association confers an immense benefit on people who have been accustomed to admire vulgar things'.⁴⁷ The association pointed out that this love of vulgarized art was not directed at one class. For example, it rebuked the 'select few' for whom 'art is a passion' for becoming 'impatient about middling excellence', and used the example of a captain of a ship who did not appreciate Turner, as an example of the audience for such work.⁴⁸

The Arts Associations committee members, exhibiting artists and exhibited landscapes and cityscapes all fit into the pattern painted by the prevailing historiography. The committee constituted an artistic elite who mostly sought fashionable London artists to represent English landscapes in the exhibitions in order to enhance the culture of the city and engender civic pride. The association's model and inspiration for the spread of this artistic taste to the area was the 'progress' that the country had made in the appreciation of art over the century. However, in one way the prevailing historiography fails to explain the motives of the association. The association undoubtedly had didactic aims for its exhibitions, but these seem to have been directed at all classes and not just the working class. Indeed the association seems to have seen its primary aim as being the spread of artistic taste, a taste shaped in the metropolis, into an area which was only just beginning to grow away from 'vulgarized' notions of art. Just as in the 1830s, the artistic elite believed themselves to be the primary arbiters of taste in the area. However, Northumberland was not the same

⁴⁵ Arts Association, *Notes on the Principle Pictures*, p. iv.

⁴⁶ Arts Association, *Notes on the Principle Pictures*, p. vii.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. viii.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. v.

culturally as it had been in the earlier decade. The region's newly professionalized artists soon showed their dislike both for the association's assumed role and for its notion of taste.

Opposition to the Arts Association

The autumn exhibition of 1879 caused a considerable amount of controversy in the local press. The two main issues were the preponderance of London exhibitors at the exhibition and the over-representation of certain established local artists, both at the expense of a younger generation of local painters. Two correspondents to the *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, calling themselves 'Turps' and 'W. Johnson', summed up the disquiet. 'Turps' asserted: '[Henry Hetherington] Emmerson, [John George] Sowerby and [John] Charlton, along with a number of London artists are each represented by four paintings ... How is this when the limited number ... allowed is three?'⁴⁹ 'W. Johnson' added that: 'this exhibition was not got up for struggling genius, but for the benefit of a class of artist who have already achieved eminence ... our young artists just need a little help and encouragement'.⁵⁰ Therefore, the correspondents argued for a greater interest to be taken in young artists at the expense of painters with established reputations. The Association however needed to sell the works of established artists in order to remain solvent and believed that their contribution to local art was based on setting an artistic example to young artists, rather than being a forum through which to sell their works. John Millard's analysis is correct in characterizing the controversy as artist against art patron.⁵¹ It was certainly not a class issue and the issue of a local identity for the exhibition was only secondary.

Much of the criticism in the letters' pages of the *Newcastle Daily Chronicle* centred around the fact that many young and local artists had had works rejected by the Arts Association committee. The newspaper itself commented that: 'the younger school of artists has fared very ill, a large number of credible pictures being returned. How far the committee is to blame ... we do not pretend to judge'.⁵² However, many contributors were angered by the rejections. One noted that the rejected work was 'superior to ... the crude

⁴⁹ Letter from 'Turps' in *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 6 September 1879.

⁵⁰ Letter from 'W. Johnson' in *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 2 September 1879.

⁵¹ See Millard, *Ralph Hedley*, p. 20.

⁵² *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 30 August 1879.

schoolboy work' of some of those who were represented.⁵³ Another contributor pointed out that the association had promised to foster local talent and added: 'the committee must surely have lost sight of the object'.⁵⁴ Yet another noted that 'of course, London, Scotch and foreign artists must have their pictures exhibited ... [but] the majority of rejected artists are local artists ... of a very high class character'.⁵⁵

Indeed, one of the main concerns of these letter writers was that artists based in London had been given undue favour. Another rejected painter wrote stating that there had been 'a great preponderance of London ... names over those belonging to the district' and that this amounted to a 'marked partiality' on the part of the selection committee.⁵⁶ Another noted that: 'we would regret to see it [the Arts Association exhibitions] degenerate into merely a branch provincial sale room for London pictures'.⁵⁷ Indeed, one correspondent went so far as pointedly to call the London contributors 'strangers'.⁵⁸

However, the newspaper furore was not conducted solely because the contributors believed that local artists should have been given preference over those based in London. Some of the most vehement criticism was reserved for the established locally-based artists who were seen as being too close to the association and so had been given favour by being allowed to show more than the regulated three works, two such artists were Robert Jobling and Henry Hetherington Emmerson. They had previously been linked to the association when, in the run up to the 1878 opening, the *Newcastle Daily Journal* noted that the two artists had been helping with the preparations for the exhibition.⁵⁹ However, this was soon denied by association and the newspaper retracted the statement, saying: 'Messrs Emmerson and Jobling were inadvertently included ... [with] selecting and hanging the pictures'.⁶⁰

Similarly, the committee members Cartmell Ridley (b.1866), John George Sowerby and Joseph Crawhall were amateur artists and Charles Mitchell's son Charles William Mitchell (1860-1918) was a successful

⁵³ Letter from 'An Admirer of Local Art' in *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 5 September 1879.

⁵⁴ *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 2 September 1879.

⁵⁵ Letter from 'LJC' in *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 2 September 1879.

⁵⁶ Letter from 'A Rejected Contributor' in *Newcastle Daily Journal*, 2 September 1879.

⁵⁷ *Newcastle Daily Journal*, 12 September 1879.

⁵⁸ Letter from 'An Amateur' in *Newcastle Daily Journal*, 12 September 1879.

⁵⁹ *Newcastle Daily Journal*, 2 September 1878.

⁶⁰ *Newcastle Daily Journal*, 4 September 1878.

artist who had exhibited at the Royal Academy. At the 1879 exhibition Joseph Crawhall's son, Joseph Crawhall Junior (1861-1913), who later became a member of the Glasgow Boys group, exhibited three paintings, Cartmell Ridley exhibited three, John George Sowerby exhibited four and Charles William Mitchell exhibited two. In addition to this Jobling exhibited three and Emmerson exhibited four. John Charlton, a local artist who had many wealthy patrons in the area also exhibited four paintings. The contributors to the local press were quick to point out that some local artists had been allowed to exceed three pictures and that relatives of the committee had been given preferential treatment, as one letter mentioned: 'Mr. Mitchell's work is not for sale ... but then Mr. Mitchell's father is on the executive committee'.⁶¹

There was clearly a sense that local art should have profited more through the 1879 exhibition than it had, especially as the committee 'profess to [had] for their aim the encouragement and development of local art'.⁶² However, as the attacks on local artists show, this was not simply an argument that revolved around the geographical location in which the artists practiced. Furthermore, there is little to suggest that the hostility displayed in the press had undertones of class antagonism. While one correspondent did mention that the association's high sale prices and works from London 'seem more suitable for the aristos [sic] who can pay a guinea for a season ticket' he set against this not the area's working classes but specifically Northumberland's young locally-based artists who, with help, could become the 'men of eminence' that the area had had 'in days gone by'.⁶³ Furthermore, this is was the only reference to the association as a class-based institution in these printed letters.

The letter writers had different connections to the issue, but, unsurprisingly many of those who corresponded with the newspapers seem to have been artists, or friends of artists, themselves. One correspondent to the *Newcastle Daily Chronicle* signed himself 'a rejected contributor', although he did not state whether he was an amateur or a professional artist, he did note that rejection from the exhibition could

⁶¹ *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 2 September 1879.

⁶² *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 6 September 1879.

⁶³ *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 2 September 1879.

mean 'loss of livelihood'.⁶⁴ Other contributors called themselves: 'an amateur',⁶⁵ and 'Turps', in possible reference to the turpentine needed to mix paints, although, again he did not say whether he is an amateur or a professional artist.⁶⁶ Another correspondent called himself 'an admirer of local art' but seems to be writing on behalf of 'an artist of my acquaintance' who had work rejected despite being 'a Kensington medallist' and having 'had pictures exhibited and favourably criticized at some of the leading exhibitions in the kingdom'.⁶⁷ The same silver medallist is mentioned as being known to the correspondent 'LJC'.⁶⁸ It seems very likely then that many of those who wrote letters on the issue had been directly or indirectly affected by the association's rejections. Only one contributor had no definite connection to the rejected artists. 'W. Johnson', who wrote to the *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, mentioned that he lived on Nixon Street in Newcastle. The 1881 census shows that the widow of William Johnson, Jane Johnson, was living in Nixon Street with her children. Her late husband's former occupation was given as an agent.

Just as many of those who wrote to the local press had professional and personal motives for doing so, so the decisions made by the Arts Association were driven by self interest. Given the often unstable financial situation of the association it was keen to exhibit works that were likely to sell and sell for a high price. Although the *Newcastle Daily Journal* noted that 'the most rigorous impartiality was shown in the choice-merit alone was the test',⁶⁹ many other letter writers disagreed. William Johnson noted that 'the first picture sold this year was 'Wallflowers', price one hundred guineas and there were others much more costly'.⁷⁰

There is ample evidence to corroborate this statement. The 1879 exhibition sold £5,000 worth of paintings while the previous two sale exhibitions had only made combined sales of between £6,000 and £7,000.⁷¹

⁶⁴ *Newcastle Daily Journal*, 2 September 1879.

⁶⁵ *Newcastle Daily Journal*, 12 September 1879.

⁶⁶ *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 6 September 1879.

⁶⁷ *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 5 September 1879.

⁶⁸ It seems likely that this artist was John Dickinson (1854-c.1902), originally from Wales, but who had lived in Newcastle for most of his young life and who maintained many professional commitments in Northumberland. He had won a silver medal for portrait painting at the South Kensington Museum and had exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1876.

⁶⁹ *Newcastle Daily Journal*, 30 September 1879.

⁷⁰ *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 2 September 1879.

⁷¹ *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 21 December 1880.

Furthermore, there were roughly 100 paintings for sale which were priced at £50 or more, the most expensive was marked at £400. Indeed, the 1879 exhibition offered particularly highly-priced paintings compared to those on sale in other years. For example, the 1882 exhibition had only around 60 paintings valued at more than £50. The Arts Association knew that in order for it to make a profit it had to sell non-local works, especially those from London, as they tended to sell for a higher price. The 1882 exhibition partly had such a small number of expensive works for sale because that year the association showed less London-based and more locally-based artists than had previously been the case. Similarly, the highest priced piece of local art work at the 1882 exhibition was a painting by Henry Hetherington Emmerson, priced at £100. He had also painted the most expensive local piece at the 1879 exhibition, priced at £200, half that asked for the most expensive work overall.⁷²

This financial motive was not lost on the local correspondents. Two accused the association directly of partiality on these grounds, 'LJC' said that local pictures had been rejected, not because they were 'indifferent works of art, but [for] the absurd reason ... that ... they are not for sale.'⁷³ 'An admirer of local art' went further and asserted that the reason the silver medallist had been rejected was 'on the ground that the association could not profit (pecunianly)' from the painting because it was not for sale.⁷⁴

The battle fought in the press was one of self interest, but it showed that the issue of the leadership of public taste was again topical. On one hand local professionals, as well as amateurs, were growing more confident in decrying the practices of the artistic elite who had clearly lost some of their authority as arbiters. But on the other hand defence of the Arts Association focused on the types of virtues which had been extolled by the artistic elite. A correspondent writing under the pseudonym 'Savto' extolled the virtues of the impartial selection process which he believed could be offered by patrons. The chief virtue 'Savto' gave of this system was that it did not favour local artists out of self-interest, when they were unworthy of being exhibited. Furthermore, he noted: 'William Armstrong [the association's chief patron] said at the opening ... that he hoped it would give a tone for the arts ... how many among [local artists]

⁷² All figures from Arts Association catalogues between 1879 and 1882.

⁷³ *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 2 September 1879.

⁷⁴ *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 5 September 1879.

would be able to make a living from their art ... let the aspiring youth ... study [and] ... not lose heart'.⁷⁵

According to 'Savto' then the artistic elite was in a unique position to act in the interest of the public and the aspiring artist.

Similarly, the *Newcastle Daily Journal* stated that some of the works which had been submitted and rejected were 'worse than mediocre' and went on to praise the efforts of the association saying: 'every lover of art and person of taste must find rare gratification'.⁷⁶ Clearly, the author agreed with Aaron Watson when he argued against Whistler's opinion that none but artists could appreciate and understand art. Indeed Watson had also pointed out that such an exhibition would lead to an 'improvement in public taste' as well as fostering 'an encouragement of artists'.⁷⁷ In such a way the association could reconcile its promise to promote local art, by the proper encouragement of good taste and the inspiration it could give to aspiring artists. Furthermore, it believed that both of these duties were best suited to the impartial artistic elite. In the preface to the inaugural exhibition in 1878, William de Brailsford noted that the association committee would 'appeal to the good taste of their fellow townsmen' and 'spread a love of the beautiful amongst us'.⁷⁸

Laura Newton compares the controversy surrounding the Arts Association with that surrounding the Northumberland Institute for the Promotion of the Fine Arts and the Northern Academy in the 1820s and 1830s.⁷⁹ However, the criticism of these institutions is best seen as the opposite of that levied at the Arts Association. In the earlier part of the century the criticism had been aimed at Richardson because he was a local artist daring to set himself up as an arbiter of public taste. In the 1870s and 1880s criticism of the association came because they were an artistic elite group who had not taken the contributions of local artists into account. In both cases the criticism that the different opposition groups used most forceful was the charge of impartiality. In the 1830s professional artists, especially local artists, were criticized for lacking taste and being too caught in the market to successfully run an exhibition. In the 1870s and 1880s

⁷⁵ Letter from 'Savto' in *Newcastle Daily Journal*, 9 September 1879.

⁷⁶ *Newcastle Daily Journal*, 30 September 1879.

⁷⁷ Arts Association, *Notes on the Principle Pictures*, p. iv.

⁷⁸ Arts Association, *Exhibition Notes*, p. 6.

⁷⁹ Newton, 'Cullercoats Artists' Colony', p. 55.

local artists and indeed local amateurs had gained the confidence to criticize patrons and they accused them of the very same vice.

The Decline of the Arts Association

The Arts Association did not collapse because of the 1879 controversy. It continued until 1882 and then it closed, after only four years and seven exhibitions, two of which comprised paintings which were entirely or mainly on loan. Given that, earlier in the century, Richardson's Northumberland Institution had lasted five years, with a very hostile press and his Northern Academy folded after four with much larger costs than those of the Arts Association, the later exhibition society cannot be seen as a commercial or cultural success. This becomes especially apparent when one considers the longevity of the Bewick Club, which formed in 1883 and lasted well into the new century.

The financial situation of the association was precarious from its first exhibition in 1878. The capital needed for 'altering the [exhibition] building' in that first year amounted to £568, which had not been cleared by 1880. Furthermore, costs were always relatively high, in 1879 and 1880 the yearly costs amounted to around £760 per annum and by 1880 they had to negotiate a rent reduction from £120 to £100 for use of the Assembly Rooms. Therefore revenue from sales and entrance fees had to be high in order for them just to break even. Although making a profit was not the chief concern for the association, the small amount of profit they made shows the instability of the project. Despite selling £4,000 worth of paintings in 1878, the association still only made a profit of £11 4s 6d. The 1879 loan exhibition made £65 1s 1d, partly facilitated by a reduction of £200 in the running costs. The autumn 1881 exhibition also made a profit of £36 14s 8d. However, both the autumn 1879 and the spring 1880 exhibitions made large losses. The controversial 1879 sale exhibition lost £132 11s 4d and its next exhibition lost £169 5s 9d. Over all the exhibitions between 1878 and 1881 there was an overall loss of £189.⁸⁰ Furthermore, the spring 1882 exhibition was so badly attended that *The Courant* reported 'we are now in the last month of the exhibition and still the complaint is a lack of attendance and purchasers'.⁸¹ The association gave no official reason for disbanding after the 1882 exhibition, however, it is likely that Charles Mitchell, who had underwritten the

⁸⁰ All figures taken from *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 21 December 1880.

⁸¹ *Newcastle Courant*, 9 June 1882.

association was no longer willing to undertake this role as the venture repeatedly incurred heavy financial losses.

The Arts Association's exhibitions compared unfavourably with those of other cities. There were approximately 14,500 visitors to the 1878 exhibition and 125 pictures sold.⁸² As Dianne Macleod notes however, this was dwarfed by the 131,899 people who visited Nottingham Castle Art Museum and 470,500 who went to Liverpool's Walker Art Gallery in the same year.⁸³ However, Macleod's comparison is more than a little unfair as the association's exhibition was only open for a few months.

Both Laura Newton and John Millard have characterized the Arts Association primarily as an 'elite' institution.⁸⁴ According to both it was largely due to this elite status that the Arts Association went into decline. Millard emphasizes the social aspects of the association's exhibitions and very quickly homes in on a quote from the *Newcastle Daily Chronicle* that the exhibition was 'a sort of fashionable parade while it lasted'.⁸⁵ He also notes that local artists were under-represented, not because they were local but because they had 'no patrons amongst the hunting, shooting and fishing gentry, or among the rich industrialists' and when they did, as with John Charlton, they were as likely, according to Millard, to be exhibited as anyone else.⁸⁶ According to Millard then it was the association's elite status that led them to lose favour, both amongst most local artists and potential exhibition goers.

Newton's explanation is also based on the idea that the association comprised of an elite grouping, but for her this elite were simply withdrawing from a process that had become 'too democratic'. She sees the increase in local art as the 'the establishment of middle-class dominance'. Therefore, according to her the middle class preferred 'works of subjects familiar to them-local scenes and people'.⁸⁷ This process and the associated decline in fashionable London art led the local elite to withdraw. These different, but equally class-based interpretations of the Arts Association's failure fit well into the wider historiography. Colleen

⁸² *Newcastle Daily Journal*, 1 February 1879.

⁸³ Macleod, 'Private and Public Patronage', p. 203.

⁸⁴ Newton, 'Cullercoats Artists' Colony' p. 59.

⁸⁵ *Newcastle Daily Chronicle* 18 November 1878, quoted in Millard, *Ralph Hedley*, p. 19.

⁸⁶ Millard, *Ralph Hedley*, p. 19.

⁸⁷ Newton, 'Cullercoats Artists' Colony' p.p. 35-6.

Denney echoes Newton's assertion that the elite withdraw their favour for a cultural enterprise in the face of growing popularity and she relies heavily on Pierre Bourdieu's work for the theoretical underpinnings of her analysis of the Grosvenor Gallery.⁸⁸

Millard's explanation for the association's decline is unconvincing. Local artists, who did not have strong connections to gentry patrons, were represented in the exhibitions. Similarly, much of the association's profits came from the sale of expensive works of art and without these the association would undoubtedly have closed before 1882. Therefore, it seems that there was art from local artists, who were not necessarily patronized by the wealthy and that in any case, its sale of 'elite' or expensive art was a key strength of the association.

Newton's explanation can only be offered tentatively at best, because a lack of financial information means that the pecuniary failure of the Arts Association, which seems to have led to its decline, is unclear. It is true that in the 1882 exhibition the ratio of Northumberland exhibitors to London artists fell to 1.8:1 whereas it had been 3:1 in 1881 and 5:1 in 1880 and 1879.⁸⁹ However, this was not the full story. It does not seem that the elite visitors fell away because of a process of democratization. The association had been making losses in 1879 and 1880, while London artists were still dominant at the exhibitions. Furthermore, the more avant-garde artists were continuing to show at the association in 1882. For example, the artists closely associated with the Grosvenor Gallery, Walter Crane, Henry Moore, John Spencer Stanhope (1829-1908) and James Tissot (1836-1902) sent eight pictures in that year, indeed, it was the first year that Stanhope had exhibited at the association.⁹⁰ As Colleen Denney notes, the Grosvenor catered to an 'elite group ... unhindered by any barriers of delicacy imposed by a largely moral middle-class public'.⁹¹ Similarly, membership fees had not been lowered from one guinea since the society's opening.

⁸⁸ See Susan P. Casteras, and Colleen Denney, *The Grosvenor Gallery: A Palace of Art in Victorian England* (Yale, 1996), p.p. 9-38.

⁸⁹ All figures from Arts Association catalogues between 1879 and 1882.

⁹⁰ Casteras and Denney, *Grosvenor Gallery*, p. 15.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p.p. 15-6.

Furthermore, any 'democratization' of the exhibitions, in Newton's terms, was not a direction in which the association was happy to move. In 1880 they had cited that their greatest asset was the 'high class works' it could offer for sale and to that end they intended to strengthen their links to London and Midlands artists.⁹² Indeed, this seems to have been a sensible financial strategy as sales from works at the 1880 exhibition, when London artists still dominated, was £5,000.⁹³ They also seem to have seen selling as their greatest asset, which can be seen by the fact that they were preparing to 'considerably augment their income' by raising their commission from 5% to 7.5%.⁹⁴

The greater ratio of Northumberland artists and the relative decline of London artists at the 1882 exhibition therefore seems to have been a choice made of necessity rather than preference. It is unlikely that the association was forced to take less London pictures than it had in 1880 and 1881 because they were failing to sell, because sales figures had been rising. However, Joseph Crawhall had resigned as secretary at the end of 1880. He seems to have been the crucial link between London artists and the association and therefore their declining success in attracting London artists seems to have been a problem of organization and not a conscious decision to make the exhibitions less exclusive.

The association's closure does not therefore seem to have been largely due to a decline in elite support because of the nature of the 1882 exhibition. There were more local artists on display in 1882 but the essential elements of the exhibition remained the same. There were still highly priced avant-garde works for sale, the subscription rate was still proscriptively high and, in any case, the association was in a financially precarious situation before the 'democratic' 1882 exhibition. Similarly, to conclude as John Millard has done, that the Arts Association failed because its exhibitions were not popular enough is only to tell a half truth. The administration costs of the exhibitions were large and the inclusion of artists such as Herkomer, who demanded high prices for his work, meant that the association had to attract very wealthy buyers.⁹⁵ Also to suggest that the association was too elite to be attractive, or that did not offer enough

⁹² *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 21 December 1880.

⁹³ *Idem*.

⁹⁴ *Idem*.

⁹⁵ At the 1882 sale exhibition the Herkomer painting *The Gloom of Idwal* (n.d.) was offered for sale at £945.

local art work for sale for it to succeed is misleading. Contemporary exhibitions, such as those in Gateshead or at the Central Exchange Gallery, do not have surviving attendance or sales figures and without these, such a conclusion is, at best, tentative.

The Arts Association was never on a secure financial footing. In the final analysis it relied too heavily on the sale of expensive works to recoup its high running costs and to mask attendance figures which probably would have had to have been very large to have made a significant financial difference. For example, the sale of *Wallflowers* (n.d.) gave the association as much money as five yearly subscriptions. Given this, the generally lower sale price of works at the 1882 exhibition, exacerbated by the lure of the fine weather during its opening, led to yet another year of heavy losses that, this time, Charles Mitchell seems unwilling to have underwritten.

The Local Character of Other Exhibitions

Between 1878 and 1882 there were several other local exhibitions which concentrated on the art of local artists. For example, The Central Exchange Art Gallery in Newcastle, The Fine Art Gallery in North Shields, Hollymount Hall in Bedlington and the Winter Gardens in Tynemouth. These exhibitions were not held because of an ideological opposition to those of the Arts Association, but were nevertheless evidence of a greater appreciation of local art and local scenes. Firstly, they acted as an outlet for local artists who felt excluded for the Arts Association but they were also another outlet for the established artists who exhibited at the association as well. Secondly, they tapped into a potential exhibition-going public and art market that was interested in local scenes and past masters of local art. Thirdly, these exhibitions did not represent the aspirations or tastes of a different social class to that of the association, indeed, many shared the same attributes.

The exhibition held at the Central Exchange Art Gallery in Newcastle in 1878 was specifically aimed at representing the works of local artists and many such artists benefited from the opportunity to exhibit. These included John Dickinson, who was rejected the following year from the Arts Association and who exhibited *The Sultana* (n.d.). Without a list of those rejected from the Arts Association it impossible to say

how many other artists were in Dickinson's position, but there were certainly many young artists who displayed their work at these venues. James Parker exhibited *Hexham-on-Tyne* (n.d.) and *In Swalwell Village* (n.d.), amongst others, at the 1883 exhibition. He was in a 21 year old artist, living in Gateshead.⁹⁶ At the same exhibition W.S. Parker exhibited. It is possible that this was James Parker's brother William who the census lists as a seventeen-year old painter. Similarly, J.D. Badenock and T. Badenock junior exhibited *A Study of Flowers* (n.d.) and *Waiting for the Boats* (n.d.) respectively. These are likely to have been John D. Badenock, a thirteen-year old lithographer's apprentice from Newcastle and his older brother Thomas Badenock junior, a sixteen-year old art student.⁹⁷ Similarly, Stuart H. Bell, an 'artist and music hall proprietor' from Durham exhibited five pictures at the Central Exchange Art Gallery in 1878.⁹⁸ Although, at 56, he was not part of the younger generation of local artists, nevertheless he had never exhibited at the Arts Association.

However, prominent and respected artists who had exhibited at the Arts Association also exhibited at the different local venues. For example, Ralph Hedley exhibited at the Bedlington Art and Industrial Exhibition in 1879, including a picture of 'a scene near a Newcastle soup kitchen'.⁹⁹ He also exhibited eight works at the Central Exchange Gallery and a number at the exhibition in Gateshead. Wilson Hepple (1848-1913) also exhibited at the Bedlington exhibition and the Central Exchange Gallery. Robert Jobling exhibited in Gateshead, Bedlington and at the Central Exchange. Similarly, artists of less fame also exhibited at more than one gallery as well as at the Arts Association. Thomas Dawson (n.d.), of Forest Hall in Northumberland exhibited at the association as well as in Gateshead. William Crosby (n.d.) of Sunderland also exhibited at the association and the Central Exchange Gallery.

The local exhibitions catered to a potential audience that was interested in paintings by local artists and depictions of local scenes. The catalogue for the Central Exchange Gallery asserted that 'the design of the present Exhibition is to bring before the inhabitants of the North of England representative paintings by

⁹⁶ www.ancestry.co.uk, accessed on 20 March 2007.

⁹⁷ *Idem*.

⁹⁸ *Idem*.

⁹⁹ *Newcastle Daily Journal*, 28 May 1879.

exclusively local artists'.¹⁰⁰ It exhibited the works of living and deceased painters from the area. The Bedlington exhibition for example ran three competitions, including one for works in oils by amateurs in Northumberland and Durham and another for professional oil painters in the same area. There were 11 oils by professionals lent for the exhibition and 20 which were not entered for a prize and 33 oils by amateurs sent for competition, 21 for exhibition only.¹⁰¹ The fine art section of the exhibition in Gateshead was comprised almost exclusively of works by artists from Northumberland and Durham and the exhibition held in the Fine Art Gallery of North Shields contained only works by local amateurs, who mostly produced local scenes.¹⁰²

Although there are no sales figures or attendance records to reflect the popularity of such enterprises, the fact that there were so many similar exhibitions seems to suggest that the organizers at least had some reason to assume financial success. The attendance and sale numbers required to make such exhibitions financially viable was very large. As the *Newcastle Daily Journal* mentioned of the Bedlington exhibition 'thousands of visitors [were] required to prevent against financial failure', although the 'organisers were confident' this could be achieved.¹⁰³ Similarly, the exhibition at the Central Exchange, organized by the veterans Barkas and Tweedy, was doubtless intended as a profit-making venture. For example, interest in the exhibition was created by a painting competition staged between Ralph Hedley and John Dickinson, where both artists had to paint a different local politician, in a timed contest.¹⁰⁴

However, this did not suggest that these exhibitions were necessarily designed to appeal only to an audience with 'the least cultural capital'. Exhibitions such as that held at the Central Exchange Gallery were doubtless intended to be socially inclusive as the admission price was only three pence, however, this does not mean that they were pandering to any particular class-bound taste.¹⁰⁵ The list of patrons for the Gateshead exhibition contained two names, Lord Armstrong and John George Sowerby, who had been

¹⁰⁰ Anon, *Catalogue of Works on View in the Central Exchange Art Gallery, Newcastle-On-Tyne* (Newcastle, 1878), preface.

¹⁰¹ Idem.

¹⁰² *Shields Daily News*, 16 September 1878.

¹⁰³ Idem.

¹⁰⁴ See *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 29 November 1879 and *Newcastle Daily Journal*, 29 November 1879.

¹⁰⁵ Anon, *Catalogue of Works on View*, frontispiece.

patrons or executive committee members of the Arts Association. Furthermore, as Greg Smith notes watercolours were associated with either a 'philistine middle-class taste' or as evidence of 'positive bourgeois values' in the period.¹⁰⁶ However, at the Bedlington exhibition there were 226 oil paintings on exhibition and only 174 watercolours.¹⁰⁷ Similarly, there were 158 oil paintings at the Gateshead Exhibition and 95 watercolours.¹⁰⁸ Also, some of the adverts included in the exhibition catalogues suggest that some exhibition goers would be from a wide variety of social backgrounds. For example, included in the catalogue for the exhibition at The Central Exchange Gallery, is an advert for 'art furniture' from Carnegie and Gullachsen, who were advertising drawing-room suites from between 17 and 40 guineas and dining-room suites from between £18 and £40.¹⁰⁹

In conclusion, the exhibitions which specialized in presenting work by local artists and which often included local scenes, between 1878 and 1883 were not operating at the opposite end of ideological class constructions of art and taste. Many of the same artists who exhibited at the association also exhibited at these local venues. However, these local exhibitions did cater for a large public interested in local scenes and they also catered for, often young, local artists who could not exhibit at the more competitive Arts Association. However, this preponderance of local scenes and local artists does not necessarily indicate an audience of a different class from those who frequented the association. It is correct to say that some local exhibitions attempted to attract as many visitors as possible by keeping entrance prices modest, but they also largely exhibited the oil paintings associated with aristocratic taste, acted as an advertising forum for luxury shops and indeed were sponsored by some of the same men who were so active in the activities of the Arts Association.

Conclusion

The work of the Arts Association fits into the assumptions made about elite-led exhibitions in the period. It was administered by a committee comprised of members of the local business and cultural elite, it

¹⁰⁶ Greg Smith, 'An Art Suited to the "English Middle Classes"? the Watercolour Societies in the Victorian Period', in Barlow and Trodd, *Governing Cultures*, p. 114.

¹⁰⁷ *Newcastle Daily Journal*, 28 May 1879.

¹⁰⁸ Gateshead Literary, Scientific and Mutual Improvement Society, *Gateshead Fine Art and Industrial Exhibition* (Gateshead, 1883), p.p. 48-66.

¹⁰⁹ Anon, *Catalogue of Works on View*, n.p.

concentrated on the works of fashionable London artists and it saw its place as being in the art world of England and not specifically Northumberland or the north-east, except that the committee evidently believed that bringing the work of such London artists augmented Newcastle's store of civic pride.

However, despite many of the assumptions made in the historiography the Arts Association and the reaction it received was not an example of a larger class conflict. The association clearly did see that its role was educate the population in matters of taste, but this didactic purpose was aimed broadly at the locality and not at specific classes within it. Similarly, the controversy surrounding the 1879 exhibition was not evidence of an anti-clite feeling. Many of the letters published in the newspapers on this topic reveal more hostility towards the local artists who were seen to be favoured rather than the fashionable London artists who were over-represented. Furthermore, many letter writers were artists who had been directly affected by Arts Association policies.

Similarly, the association did not collapse because it was too elite, either because the tastes of this elite were unpopular or because greater popularity led to elite withdrawal. The association was keen to patronize fashionable and expensive London artists and it did so until its closure. However, it had been in a financially precarious situation for most of its existence and the administrative problems in 1882 led to a decline in the numbers of expensive works for sale and left the association without its biggest source of revenue. The central problem of the association was that it almost totally relied financially on the sales of very expensive works and not on subscriptions and attendances. Also, the other local exhibition venues, which were running exhibitions simultaneously to those at the association, were not catering to a different audience in terms of social class, although some attempted to be more inclusive. They concentrated on traditional oil painting displays and had some of the same patrons and committee members at the association. These exhibitions did, however, cater to a socially diverse market which was particularly interested in local scenes and the works of local painters. At the same time these painters were beginning to grow in confidence as *local* artists and to challenge the artistic elite's role as arbiter of public taste. These two strands would come forcibly together in 1883 with the opening of the Bewick Club.

Chapter Four

County and National Identity, c.1880-1900.¹

This chapter will demonstrate that county identity in Northumbrian art was a key concern of the area's prominent artists in the 1880s and 1890s. The county's history and achievements were celebrated. The Naturalism that was adopted by these artists allowed them to give a sense of place to their paintings. Most of the historiography states that, for English or British artists, the reaction against 'the modern' at the end of the century comprised of picturesque paintings of southern rural settings and an avoidance of urban scenes.² However, the place Northumberland artists often chose to depict represented a reaction to 'the modern', not through the eschewal of urban pictures, but by a concentration on the local and the privileging of the 'insider's view'. This was reinforced by the techniques and non-picturesque subject matter they used. This was of a type that was sometimes considered un-English and somewhat subversive by metropolitan critics.

According to Kenneth McConkey the proponents of Naturalism described it as '*actualité*, the photographic [focusing] ... upon individuals, states of mind and precise locations'.³ Furthermore, it was not 'specifically constructed as representations of the lower social orders, although the peasant ... [and] the petit bourgeois [were] its most frequent subjects'.⁴ Naturalism was supposed to be stripped of the 'social meaning' attached to the paintings of the 'typical contemporary conditions of the lower orders', seen in the work of the Realists.⁵ In the 1880s especially, both Realism and Naturalism were disliked by many metropolitan critics for three reasons. Firstly, because, according to McConkey, they were 'sub-set [s] of Salon

¹ John Millard, *Ralph Hedley: Tyneside Painter (1848-1913)* (Newcastle, 1990), p. 84.

² It is worth noting that recently interest in the reaction of British art to modernity and its adoption of Modernism has been growing as older, Continental definitions of Modernism are broadened out. Lisa Tickner, *Modern Life and Modern Subjects: British Art in the Early Twentieth Century* (New Haven, 2000); David Peters Corbett and Lara Perry, *English Art 1860-1914: Modern Artists and Identity* (Manchester, 2000). However, there are still some art historians who believe that to talk of English Modernism is oxymoronic. See Charles Harrison, "Englishness" and "Modernism" Revisited', *Modernism/Modernity* 6 (1999).

³ Kenneth McConkey, *Memory and Desire: Painting in Britain and Ireland at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Aldershot, 2002), p. 271.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 270.



naturalism' and this '“French” style posed a ... threat to the national school', especially as it 'challenged the accepted canon of ugliness and beauty'.⁶

As Ysanne Holt states, 'Nostalgia [was] a vital current running through the late Victorian and Edwardian period'.⁷ This view is shared by many historians in the field and, indeed, as Holt herself notes, there has 'been much discussion of this cultural phenomenon in recent years'.⁸ Pertinently, 'it is undeniable that most of this nostalgia focused on the countryside, as a place of idealized traditions and virtues'.⁹ This forms the basis of the second reason why metropolitan critics disliked some rural Naturalism, because it had the 'worrying potential for brutal honesty' and many metropolitan critics as regarded as undesirable non-picturesque paintings of the countryside.¹⁰ Anna Gruetzner Robins notes that this was because 'by the 1880s the English middle classes associated filth, poverty and deviant behaviour with the cities'.¹¹ George Clausen's (1852-1944) painting *Flora* (1883), which shows the model Susan Chapman as a poor urban flower seller, did not attract much negative press attention, whereas, similar earlier paintings of the same model, but this time placed in a rural setting, were treated with 'vicious condemnation', because of the extremely harsh manner by which they characterized country life.¹²

The third reason that metropolitan critics disliked Naturalism was that, for them, such paintings presented little evidence of moral or intellectual ideas and were unduly concerned with surface detail. As Robins notes of *The Graphic's* attitude; 'why represent "physical ugliness and degradation" without a moral or narrative element?'¹³ McConkey goes so far as to suggest that Naturalism was a type of 'democratic art' that was free of the symbolism that could only be read with training. It was therefore disliked by some writers because it 'appealed directly to the public' and 'did not exist for the gratification of hostile

⁶ Ibid., p. 122.

⁷ Ysanne Holt, *British Artists and the Modernist Landscape* (Aldershot, 2003), p. 6.

⁸ Idem.

⁹ Idem.

¹⁰ Holt, *British Artists*, p. 14.

¹¹ Anna Gruetzner Robins, 'Living the Simple Life: George Clausen at Chidwick Green, St Albans', in David Peters Corbett, Ysanne Holt and Fiona Russell (eds.), *The Geographies of Englishness: Landscape and the National Past 1880-1940* (New Haven, 2002) p. 22.

¹² Ibid., p. 21.

¹³ Idem.

metropolitan critics'.¹⁴ According to McConkey this type of Naturalism became popular instead with 'newly formed public galleries ... [which] sought out pictures with which everyone could identify'.¹⁵

According to the historiography, by the 1890s the Naturalism of those such as Clausen and Stanhope Forbes (1859-1912) had become something that was acceptable to the metropolitan critics, because it became about 'something more' than a recording of events,¹⁶ indeed, it became evidence of 'a healthy affirmation of the British character',¹⁷ as individualized peasants and fisher folk became 'types' which celebrated 'the unbroken pride and dignity' as well as the health of rural inhabitants.¹⁸ Thus the nostalgia for the countryside, as embodied by the rural south, became bound up with the celebration of rural workers, whose fitness and productivity were made to contrast to the physical degradation of urban dwellers. There are some disagreements as to the particular nature of this synthesis in the paintings of the 1890s.

McConkey emphasizes the role of the heroic peasant, whereas Ysanne Holt emphasizes the 'insider's' view one gained from earlier Naturalism was replaced by a distancing between the artists and the subject. This not only meant less attention was paid to individual characteristics but also that the peasant became secondary to the scene. They became, 'simply an accessory, an attribute of the English landscape and no longer such an essential icon'.¹⁹ Indeed, Nina Lübbren notes that even the Naturalism of the 1880s was inauthentic and preformed in order to fill the nostalgic urban audience's imagination with a 'place-myth' of 'interpersonal warmth and support', to replace the 'modern class divisions and alienated labour divisions' inherent in the cities.²⁰

According to most of the historiography this 'place myth' art, both in terms of its typical landscape and peasant figures, was intimately bound up with representations of the nation in Britain, especially as by the 1880s and 1890s 'the English countryside was widely believed to be a national asset'.²¹ Furthermore, as Martin Wiener has stressed, the economic pull of the south-east led to the nation becoming predominantly represented by the rural southern metaphor. This seems to have been particularly true of landscape painting

¹⁴ McConkey, *Memory and Desire*, p. 135.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

¹⁸ Nina Lübbren, *Rural Artists' Colonies in Europe 1870-1910* (Manchester, 2001), p. 49.

¹⁹ Holt, *British Artists*, p.p. 26-7.

²⁰ Lübbren, *Rural Artists' Colonies*, p. 63.

²¹ Holt, *British Artists*, p. 3.

and the painting of rural scenes, which McConkey believes represented 'a whole value system'.²² Indeed, as he states, they had become 'one of the great archetypes of the age'.²³ However, he also notes that the historiographical focus on depictions of the Home Counties has perhaps been exaggerated and that 'Englishness was much more expansive than is sometimes claimed'.²⁴ He takes the influence of the Barbizon School, the art drawn from Asia and the Far East and the production of illustrated travelogues as evidence of an expansive Englishness. However, these could just as likely be examples of artistic priorities that were not strongly linked to the notion of Englishness at all. Therefore, for McConkey the taste for Asian art became bound up with the idea of Empire and examples of French art were merely subsumed into the 'English' art project.

Paintings of fishing communities have also been assumed to have been bound up with the depictions of national virtues. As with paintings of the rural peasantry, the historiography holds that such art emphasized the 'traditional ways of life' followed by such communities, as well as focusing on their 'heroic struggle' against harsh conditions.²⁵ Many such depictions are also held to have encapsulated traditional gender roles, with 'imperilled and active seamen' and 'anxious shore bound women'.²⁶ Indeed, so much is often obvious in the art itself. Furthermore, however, these depictions are linked with representations of the 'desirable national characteristics' of Englishness,²⁷ and showing the world that 'the mother nation was still in good heart'.²⁸ Laura Newton's reading of the coastal colonies, especially that of Cullercoats, is more nuanced. She asserts that 'the Cullercoats output ... fed into a much wider attempt ... to construct certain notions of 'Britishness' but that, nevertheless, 'Cullercoats imagery was bound up with the region's desire to 'reinvent' and 'repackage' itself'.²⁹ According to her, as 'economic life [moved] away from the northern provinces to London ... local art became synonymous with inferior ... art and these British colonies

²² McConkey, *Memory and Desire*, p. 156.

²³ Kenneth McConkey, 'Haunts of the Ancient Past' in Corbett, *The Geographies of Englishness*, p. 84.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

²⁵ Lübbren, 'Toilers of the Sea' in Corbett, *The Geographies of Englishness*, p. 30.

²⁶ Lübbren, 'Toilers of the Sea', p. 41.

²⁷ Kenneth McConkey, 'The Pallid Gleam of the Imagination: Coastal Art Colonies in Britain at the Turn of the Twentieth Century' in Laura Newton (ed.), *Painting at the Edge: British Coastal Art Colonies 188-1930* (Bristol, 2005), p. 17.

²⁸ Austin Wormleighton, 'Lamorna: A Place Apart' in Newton, *Painting at the Edge*, p61

²⁹ Laura Newton, 'The Cullercoats Artists' Colony c.1870-1914', unpubl. PhD thesis, University of Northumbria, 2001, p. 145.

lost much of their relevance'.³⁰ According to Newton then, these colonies could produce art that was directed towards a construction of British identity that was inclusive of local differences. According to her this only became unsustainable after the art produced in the northern regions began to be seen by London critics and buyers as inferior.

However, this analysis ignores the importance of the regional market for such art and the standing that some artists achieved in their own localities, without becoming noted in London. As Newton herself asserts, the Cullercoats' artists 'recognised that their primary market was in the region rather than in London'.³¹ However, as so many of the Cullercoats paintings were exhibited and sold in Northumberland the artists could not be simply concerned with repackaging the area to a wider audience. The analysis also ignores the fact that London artists and journalists had always seen 'provincial' art as inferior. Therefore, when the Cullercoats' artists exhibited in London, assertions of regional difference, beyond the merely superficial, were unlikely to be treated on equal terms with art emanating from the established London artists. Analyzing the output of such colonies with reference to their reception by, and relationship with, the London-based market is therefore somewhat misleading for an analysis of Northumbrian artists' work, although it may work as a useful framework for the art that came from areas such as Cornwall, where most prominent artists were visitors from London and who always focused on the metropolitan market.

The historiography allows a geographically more expansive definition of Englishness in relation to the coastal colonies than it does for the depictions of rural southern England. As Lübbren notes, 'Cornwall became the most painted region of Britain outside London, followed only by ... the fishing village of Whitby in East Yorkshire'.³² Indeed, Laura Newton's recent work on coastal art colonies contains chapters on places as diverse as Cullercoats in Northumberland, Lamorna in Cornwall and Kirkcudbright on the Scottish borders.³³ However, the sites that have been emphasized in the historiography as 'representing' Englishness are often self selecting. For example, Lübbren's analysis of the places most frequently painted in Britain comes from an analysis of Royal Academy exhibitions. Similarly, Northumberland, for example, is held to 'represent' Englishness in the depictions of the Cullercoats fishing village, because the colony

³⁰ Laura Newton, *Cullercoats: A North-East Colony of Artists* (Bristol, 2003), p. 36.

³¹ Newton, *Cullercoats: A North-East Colony*, p. 59.

³² Lübbren, 'Toilers of the Sea', p. 29.

³³ Newton, *Painting at the Edge*.

there was highly integrated into personal and professional networks which crossed into the artists' colonies of Staithes and Newlyn and some Cullercoats paintings were exhibited in London galleries.

However, landscape paintings emanating from Northumberland or other northern counties are rarely given as examples of depictions of 'English' landscape because, such paintings were relatively under-represented at the Royal Academy and landscape painters worked in a more solitary fashion. Therefore, when they did not have links to artists prominent in London, they have been forgotten by the historiography. In this way, rural Englishness largely confines itself to the Home Counties, whereas coastal Englishness is seen as more expansive. Furthermore, when historians have attempted to broaden their geographical focus, as did McConkey in his consideration of Asian art and as did Newton in her geographically wide study of coastal colonies, the tendency has been to incorporate these examples into the expression of 'Englishness' and not to see them as perusing goals which were different from, or even contradictory to, the 'Englishness' project.

By contrast some art historians have given prominence to the priorities seen in some turn-of-the-century art as depictions of 'otherness', especially in their use of Naturalism and Realism. Linda Nochlin states that to be 'of one's place' was an important for Realists as 'to be of one's times' and that these two imperatives were often contradictory. 'To be of one's place implies an attachment to more lasting values' while to be of one's time privileges 'the up-to-date modernity of a basically urban vision'.³⁴ However, her studies of Gustav Coubert (1819-1877) and the Puerto Rican artist Francisco Oller (1833-1917), necessarily lead her to conflate studies of place with studies of 'rural life and folk customs ... in the form of regionalism or provincialism' given the painters' subject matter.³⁵ For Nochlin an artist's sense of local or provincial place was sometimes as much about exploiting difference and being 'subversive of the dominant culture' as it was also sometimes an attempt to integrate the depicted province with the artistic and cultural centre.³⁶ Sometimes historians have attempted to re-cast art that has been thought of as peripheral to a dominant culture as evidence of a distinct culture itself. In this way John Morrison has characterized Scottish

³⁴ Linda Nochlin, *The Politics of Vision: Essays on Nineteenth-Century Art and Society* (London, 1991), p19.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.p. 19-20.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

Highland paintings of the nineteenth century as self-conscious displays of Scottish identity that were 'overtly different from England' but still 'ostentatiously patriotic to Britain'.³⁷

The historiography therefore suggests that in England in the 1880s and 1890s there was an artistic movement towards national English identity, which meant a focus on the Home Counties as a site for rural landscapes and coastal regions as depicted by prominent art colonies, both of which emphasized the virtues of English landscape and custom. Within this, Naturalism, in its earliest form, was shunned as being too 'French' and literal and was only seen as acceptable when it shifted to the depictions of English 'types' rather than individualist scenes. Similarly, as economic power moved away from the northern regions, the coastal depictions that displayed a sense of regional difference were marginalized.

However, the primary focus for many artists working in Northumberland in the 1880s and 1890s was the county. They worked in a Naturalist style and chose to link their paintings to the area with the use of local geographical detail, either simply to give the work more realist 'authenticity' or to enhance the effect of their work for a local audience. Some artists' engagement with the local went further than the use of geographical detail and they created paintings that were atypical of Naturalist renderings of rural and coastal scenes. These paintings made comment on local perceptions, for example, of gender roles and relations in the fishing and farming communities as well as striving to portray themselves as 'insiders'. Furthermore, the local market was strong and artists were able to incorporate these elements into their work because in many cases the viewers and buyers would understand the references to place and society. However, it is worth noting that although the market allowed artists to enhance their local identity, some artists chose to play down the local specificity in their work and to produce paintings that, arguably, emphasized their 'Englishness'.

The first section of this chapter will explore the use of local geographical detail in the works of Northumberland artists and their use of Naturalist technique. It will stress that just as early Naturalist works were meant to be understood by all, the works of these artists carried details that would have been familiar to local audiences and that this carried on being the case into the 1890s. It will also concentrate on

³⁷ John Morrison, *Painting the Nation: Identity and Nationalism Scottish Painting, 1800-1920* (Edinburgh, 2003), p. 225.

depictions of the less tangible aspects of local and county identity, which can be seen in some artists' work, including references to particularized gender relations and sites of nostalgia as well as the artists' conception of themselves as 'insiders'.

The second section will examine the markets to which many of the most prominent Northumberland artists had access and will reveal that although artists were often able to display and sell across the country, for many their staple market was within Northumberland and the surrounding areas.

The third section will examine the work of artists such as Jobling and Marsh who played down elements of geographical specificity and whose works displayed conventional depictions of fishing and rural communities that arguably celebrated 'English' virtues.

Local Geographical and Social Detail

The adoption of Naturalism and Realism by some Northumberland artists allowed works to convey a greater sense of local detail and colour than had previously been fashionable for paintings of landscapes and rural scenes. Although Julian Treuherz doubts that Naturalism ever came to such a 'culturally isolated' place as Northumberland,³⁸ the adoption of the square-brush technique by artists such as Ralph Hedley and Robert Jobling from the mid-1880s suggests otherwise. Indeed, John Millard convincingly suggests that 'it probably arrived on Tyneside through the local artists Thomas Bowman Garvie [1859-1942] ... [who was] partly trained in Paris'.³⁹ Newton also notes that in the 1880s 'other Naturalists sent work to Newcastle' to be exhibited.⁴⁰ Although by the late 1890s depictions of the Northumberland coastline were increasingly executed in an Impressionist style, the imperative to 'be of one's place' seems to have carried over to artists such as George Horton.

Indeed, the work of many Northumberland artists showed an engagement with the specifics of the locale, at least on a superficial visual level. The Cullercoats colony 'had badged itself with a particular topography'

³⁸ Julian Treuherz, *Hard Times: Social Realism in Victorian Art* (London, 1987), p. 117.

³⁹ Millard, *Ralph Hedley*, p. 30.

⁴⁰ Newton, *Painting at the Edge*, p. 125.

unlike the work of those at Newlyn.⁴¹ Some spots were so popular with local artists that George Horton was approached by 'a workman' whilst painting Girdle Cake Cottage and told 'I'm not keen on your Girdle Cake-we have too much of it ... Ralph Hedley of Newcastle made a beautiful one ... we have had enough of the old cottage'.⁴² Robert Jobling's depictions of Cullercoats are thought to be so faithful to detail that Tony Harrison speculates that Jobling's picture *The Day is Done and Darkness Falls from the Wings of Night* (1885) knowingly depicts one of the local houses in which the American artist Winslow Homer (1836-1910) resided, Jobling having drawn attention to it by painting it with a lit interior.⁴³ Indeed, paintings by Jobling such as *Launching the Cullercoats Lifeboat* (1902) and *The Lifeboat Off* (1884) also depict scenes that are locally specific. Similarly, throughout Horton's career he was interested in accurately depicting areas in North and South Shields, in works such as *Winter, Clive Street, North Shields* (n.d.), *Kirkcaldy Arms* (n.d.) and *Comical Corner, South Shields* (1935). Indeed, the *North Mail* commented that 'there are few Tyneside artists who know their native heath and "ain folk" better than Mr. Horton'.⁴⁴ Ralph Hedley was also particularly interested in depicting local scenes. Hedley painted scenes of rural and urban Northumberland as well as rural north Yorkshire, for example, *Paddy's Clothes Market, Sandgate* (1898), which illustrated a scene from Newcastle's quayside and *Proclaiming Stagshaw Fair at Corbridge* (1882) which displayed the announcement of the annual fair, in the centre of Corbridge village.

⁴¹ McConkey, *Memory and Desire*, p. 135.

⁴² Horton's writings (unsorted), DF.HOR 4106/9-10, bundle 5.

⁴³ See Tony Harrison, *Winslow Homer in England* (Maine, 2004).

⁴⁴ *North Mail* (n.d.), Newspaper Cuttings and other Information about George Horton, DF.HOR 4106/6.



Local detail in 4.1 George Horton, *Kilcaldy Arms* and 4.2 Ralph Hedley, *Paddy's Clothes Market*, Sandgate.

Ralph Hedley was however more interested in documenting local rural customs and work practices than in depicting specific locations and indeed much of his later work is of this nature, for example, *The Wincing Sheet* (1898) and *The Saw Pit* (1896). For Hedley, 'it was unnecessary for any local artist to go further afield than his own district'.⁴⁵ *The Northumbrian* noted that 'the locality [was] depicted so truthfully by [Hedley]'.⁴⁶

He approached many of his Naturalist paintings in a documentary fashion, collecting newspaper articles concerning local traditions, including Barge Day on the Tyne⁴⁷ and 'blessing the crops' in Yorkshire.⁴⁸ Furthermore, his commitment to faithful documentation can be glimpsed from the fact that he photographed events such as harvests and fairs for use in his paintings, including a number of photographs

⁴⁵ *Eldon Magazine*, 29 January 1930.

⁴⁶ John Storey, 'The Burial Place of Thomas Bewick, Ovingham', *The Northumbrian* 4:100, (Nov 1883), p. 343.

⁴⁷ *Evening Chronicle*, 7 May 1891.

⁴⁸ Unidentified newspaper edition, in Ralph Hedley Collection, TWCMS. 2004.2473

of loading hay into carts ⁴⁹ and one labelled 'Gypsies on the Beach at South Shields 1876'. ⁵⁰ One such photograph intriguingly has a note written on the reverse which reads 'Shooting gallery photo for a picture. Man is a cousin lost at sea where ship went down off Scotland. Sole survivor was the captain who was ... washed ashore'. ⁵¹

Henry Hetherington Emmerson was also keen to depict local detail in his depictions of Cullercoats. This was especially the case for his work from the mid-1880s onwards, as he moved away from a Pre-Raphaelite to a Naturalist style. Therefore, although *Waiting for the Boats* (1870), shows that 'specificity of place [was] not yet an important factor', *Bereaved* (1888) depicts a local funeral custom in a particularly detailed manner.

Ralph Hedley's response to the perceived material and moral problems of urban life was not unique to the area, he made the standard connections between poverty and intemperance in *Weary Waiting* (1894), depicted the effects of consumption in *The Breadwinner* (1894), offered sentimentalized portraits of poor children in *The News-boy* (1878) and *The Carrier's Cart, Last in Market* (1885) and depicted the uncomfortable meeting of middle- and working-class life in *The Ballad Seller* (1884). Despite being conventional in his treatment of urban poverty, Hedley used local settings to great effect in such works, directly confronting his Newcastle audience with familiar scenes of local want. His work had further local significance when one considers the timing and setting of some of his works on this theme, reminding audiences of the area's past and its current situation in regards to social ills such as unemployment.

Out of Work (1888) was a painting focused on the impact of unemployment on those in the shipbuilding industry. It was also an example of Hedley commenting on a national phenomenon, but within a local context. The work was produced in 1888, when the issues surrounding unemployment were high in the national consciousness. In 1886 the Commission on the Depression of Trade and Industry filed its report and in 1888 the London dockworkers went on strike. More broadly, as K. D. Brown has pointed out, 'From

⁴⁹ Photograph, Ralph Hedley Collection, TWCMS., 2004.2482.

⁵⁰ Photograph, Ralph Hedley Collection, TWCMS., 2004.395.

⁵¹ Photograph, Ralph Hedley Collection, TWCMS., 2004.2475.

the 1880s onwards unemployment as a social phenomenon began to figure more prominently in the public consciousness and social analysis'.⁵² The word itself -as opposed to 'unemployed'- made its first appearance in the *Oxford English Dictionary* in 1888, the same year *The Times*, on 2 February 1888, referred to it as 'the fundamental problem of modern society'.⁵³ However, the timing of the painting was significant in local as well as national terms. These problems had also been brought to the attention of Northumberland audiences as strikes occurred on Tyneside in 1879 and New Unionism arrived in the area with the Tyneside and District Labourers' Union, in 1888, which absorbed many of the unskilled labourers in the ship building industries along the Tyne.

The setting of the work, as well as its timing, gave the work a local dimension. Hedley set *Out of Work* in the area of the Quayside that also served as the backdrop to *The Nineteenth Century Iron and Coal* (1861), by William Bell Scott, Hedley's teacher at the Newcastle School of Art. In contrast to that picture, in Hedley's work the river is empty except for two or three idle fishing boats and the clamour and noise of Bell's work is replaced by the silence of the four listless workers, the two men engrossed in the situations vacant listings and the scavenging dog. A grey fog replaces the sunlight of Bell's earlier piece. Hedley returned to this backdrop again when depicting the poor in 1898 in *Paddy's Clothes Market, Sandgate*.

⁵² K. D. Brown, *Industry and Services: Employment and Unemployment* (Oxford, 2005), at <http://64.233.179.104/search?q=cache:kDSFEND9wiMJ:www.history-compass.com/images/store/HICO/chapters/566.pdf+unemployment+tyneside+1888&hl=en&gl=uk&ct=cln&cd=10>, accessed 2 February 2005.

⁵³ *Idem*.



Depictions of the Quayside, 4.3 Ralph Hedley's *Out of Work* and 4.4 William Bell Scott's *The Nineteenth Century Iron and Coal*.

Much of Hedley's urban work depicted the social effects of poverty and the responsibility of the wealthy towards the poor. Such themes were always explored in a local setting and much of the direct impact of his work was achieved by placing his figures in locally familiar areas, instantly recognizable to those who viewed his work at the regional exhibitions at which he most often displayed. In *The Newsboy* (1892), Hedley depicted a young worker. He is the only figure in the painting and he is staring directly at the audience. The boy's stare is challenging and self-assured, which is emphasised by the relaxed angle of his head and the way he leaning against the wall. Yet he is evidently still very young and the sackcloth he wears over his clothes to keep out the cold shows the desperation of his situation. Hedley set the portrait of the boy against a wall covered in posters for the *Newcastle Chronicle*, *Journal* and *Leader*, which placed the painting geographically. More specifically, the painting depicted a newsboy who worked outside of Newcastle's Central Station, the main route in and out of the city. The painting therefore did not confront the viewer with an imaginary and general conception of child poverty, but rather with a specific and real instance of child poverty, in a very public space. Similarly, *The Ballad Seller* (1884) was set against the Newcastle landmark the Black Gate, which was also painted that year, in its state of disrepair, by John Teasdale and *Weary Waiting* (1894) was set outside the Stone Cellars public house near the river Ouseburn.



Local poverty in 4.5 Ralph Hedley *The Ballad Seller* (1884) and 4.6 Ralph Hedley *The Newsboy* (1892)

Local visual detail was used by most Northumberland artists in the 1880s and 1890s and was linked to the adoption of Naturalist or Realist techniques. However, local detail in depictions of architecture and landscape had not been uncommon in Northumberland's artistic output throughout the nineteenth century, it was now being used to 'place' everyday scenes and therefore give them a greater authenticity and impact for local audiences, rather than merely as picturesque detail.

Some artists further identified themselves with their locality by reflecting local social attitudes to issues such as gender and the perception of women workers. One such female group with an established place in the local imagination was that of the fishwives and it may have been such ingrained perceptions that informed many of the paintings that portrayed this group in a non-traditional manner.

In Tyneside, urban levels of non-domestic female employment were considerably lower than in other English regions. Compared to the national average of 29%, only 22% of Tynemouth's workforce was female and in the industrial areas of Tyneside the figure was significantly lower again.⁵⁴ Therefore, the spectacle of the physically active fishwife, who inhabited the public urban space of the Tyneside market,

⁵⁴ All figures from North Tyneside CDP, "North Shields: Women's Work" in *North Tyneside CDP Final Report, Volume Five* (Newcastle, 1977), p.p. 28-9.

was particularly startling and incongruous in the setting of Northumberland. Indeed, the 'masculinity' and non-conformity of the female fishing community had been a subject of satire and satirical art for much of the nineteenth century. As James Gregory notes in his study on north-eastern eccentrics 'eccentric women were workers in public such as the fishwives of Sandgate, Newcastle'.⁵⁵ One such example cited by James is that of Peggy Potts, a Sunderland fishwife famous for her 'masculine' traits, such as her loud voice and commanding personality. By the time of her death in 1875 her character was in the process of partial rehabilitation, when it became widely known that she had been 'forced' into a 'masculine' role by the fact that her husband was an unemployed alcoholic.

Similarly, popular songs were written about fishwives, including the famous *Sandhill Oratory* by R. Emery, which was comic song about a fishwife's argument with a Scottish colonel. The comedy came from the audience's awareness of the stereotype of the fishwives' temper and language and, coming from outside the area, the colonel's ignorance at making a joke at the woman's expense. The dramatic song *The Cullercoats' Fishwife* described the harshness of female labour, placing it on a par with the conditions experienced by the fishermen: 'an' mony a caud wint'ry neet he risks his life ... an' mony a caud wint'ry day aw gans about sellin'.⁵⁶

The 'heroic' quality of the female relationship with the sea was also ingrained in the local imagination by the figure of Grace Darling, a local woman, who, in 1838 helped her father rescue the crew of the *Forfarshire*, wrecked off the coast of north Northumberland. Although Darling became nationally famous, she was most often painted by local artists throughout the rest of the century, in works by Henry Perlee Parker, John Reay and John Wilson Carmichael amongst others. Furthermore, many Northumberland artists celebrated the fishwives' activities and the same hardy and heroic qualities that made Darling famous.

⁵⁵ James Gregory, "'Local Characters': Eccentricity and the North-East in the Nineteenth Century', *Northern History* 42 (2005), p. 174.

⁵⁶ Ned Corvan, *The Cullercoats' Fishwife Broadsheet* (Newcastle, 1854-1865), Gateshead Council, FARNE: Folk Archive Resource North East. (Gateshead 2004), at www.asaplive.com/archive/detail.asp?id=E0102201, accessed on 21 July 2006.

Fishwives may have been considered 'masculine' in many coastal areas of England, yet the myth of masculine and sometimes heroic fishwife and coastal woman had a particular resonance in Northumberland. William Tomlinson's guide to Northumberland noted in 1888 that 'very familiar indeed is the figure of the Cullercoats fishwife ... she trudges along with a heavy creel of fish'.⁵⁷ This was due partly to the fact that local painters continued to immortalize the 'heroic' Grace Darling, but also because female employment in the public sphere was more unusual in some parts of the area than elsewhere and hence the stereotypical image of the public, masculine and physically active fishwife was more incongruous with norm of female domesticity. It was also partly due to the immortalization of the stereotypical fishwife, within the phenomenon of the eccentric celebrity, which was both particularly strong in the area and was itself an expression of 'regional patriotism'.⁵⁸

The 'masculinity' of the fishwives' work was in evidence in some of the work of Robert Jobling and his wife Isa Thompson (1850-1926). It was seen in Jobling's *Winter Fuel* (1910), set in Staithes, in which a man and woman were shown labouring together, carrying heavy bundles of wood across a beach in stormy weather, side by side. The most celebrated of Thompson's works on female employment on the coast was *Fisher Folks* (1893), which depicted the exhausting effects of fishwives' physical labour. Laura Newton describes the work as 'an uncompromising exploration of these women's struggle for survival'.⁵⁹

Another Northumberland artist, John Charlton (1849-1917) also depicted female physical labour in *The Women* (1910). However, his treatment of the subject was rather different from that of Jobling and Thompson. Charlton's work celebrated women's physical role in his rendering of the rescue of the *Lovely Nellie*. The *Lovely Nellie* was shipwrecked in a storm near Whitley Bay in 1861, however, the lifeboat could not be launched from Cullercoats because of the storm and so it had to be pulled three miles down the coast to the scene. Charlton's depiction accords to one version of the events, which held that it was the women of the fishing community who towed the lifeboat. This painting is particularly interesting as this account was not uncontentious and some contemporary reports suggested that horses performed the

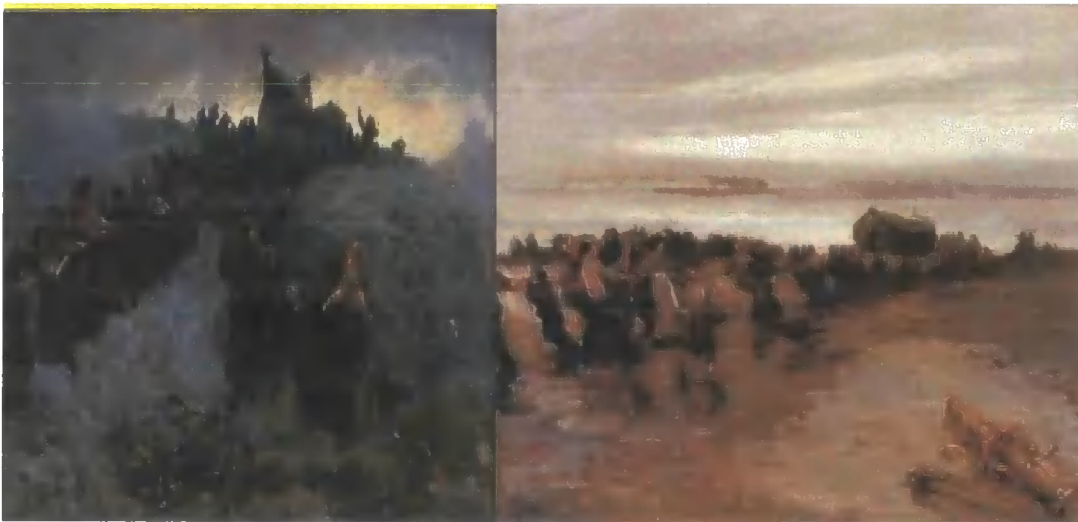
⁵⁷ William Tomlinson, *Guide to Northumberland 1881* (Knaresbrough, 1888), n.p.

⁵⁸ Gregory, 'Local Characters', p.185.

⁵⁹ Newton, *Painting at the Edge*, p. 103.

hauling. Charlton's choice to illustrate this version of events was all the more striking when one considers that one of Charlton's greatest artistic strengths was in equine depictions. Horses were foregrounded in many of his military works and for which he gained national notoriety. It is likely that the story of the women who towed the lifeboat was interesting to more artists than Charlton. Around the same time as *The Women* was finished, John Gilroy (1868-1944) was painting a similar scene in *Hauling up the Lifeboat, Holy Island* (1910-1920). This painting was not of the 1861 incident, but the subject, of men and women pulling a lifeboat to shore, was very similar, as was the composition of the work.

Laura Newton argues that *The Women* did not constitute a positive statement on 'the new political and social freedoms' of women but to therefore read the picture as a traditional 'fetishizing' women and allowing the male viewer to be 'dominant' does not tell the whole story.⁶⁰ Other readings were possible, especially when one considers the work in relation to that of Gilroy. Both works are very similar and in Gilroy's women and men haul the lifeboat together.



Depictions of women in 4.7 John Charlton *The Women* (1910) and 4.8 John Gilroy *Hauling up the Lifeboat, Holy Island* (1910-1920)

⁶⁰ Newton, *Painting at the Edge*, p. 130.

Outside of Tyneside female labour relations in the rural areas of Northumberland was common. Indeed, women were involved in rural labour into the twentieth century, even when public opinion and acts such as the Agricultural Gangs Act of 1870, had led to the practice dying out in other counties. In 1871 females made up 22% of the agricultural workforce in Northumberland, at a time when the comparable figure was 3.5% in the rest of England and Wales and this situation continued into the twentieth century. Therefore, local artists, whose work was based in the rural areas, depicted female labour. This was especially true of Ralph Hedley's portraits of local workers that included paintings of female labour. These depictions avoided a critical tone towards the issue of female employment, without attempting the idealization of female labour. Rather, in keeping with his documentary approach to the area's working subjects, they strived to remain neutral and avoid the sentimentalization that was often present in his depictions of children. In many of his paintings of female labour, men and women were depicted working alongside each other on light tasks, such as in *The Winnowing Sheet* (1898), in heavy labour, such as in *The Potato Heap* (1903) and in destitution in *Firewood Gatherers* (1907). Sometimes, Hedley changed the sex of a working figure without making any further changes to the painting that would have implied an altered moral stance towards the subject. This was the case in *The Brickfield* (1903), which displayed a young female worker bending to lay out bricks in the sun. However, an earlier sketch of the painting, whilst documenting all the same stages of the brick-making process, showed a young man performing the same task. Here the important issue Hedley wished to highlight was the proto-industrial process and not the matter of female employment, which is taken as an uncontested given in the Northumberland countryside.

For Hedley issues of female employment were of little importance in the depiction of rural life. The workers themselves, whether male or female, were merely the agents of more interesting local work practices and customs, to such an extent that their gender was interchangeable. For him, the detail of the local was given precedence over the concerns of the nationwide urban audience. The neutral and non-judgmental stance that Hedley took in relation to female rural workers was at odds with the metropolitan condemnation of female labour, as described by Anna Robbins, who attributes the poor reception of challenging visions of female rural labour, such as in *Hoeing Turnips* (1883), to the moral outrage caused by the findings of 1867 Parliamentary Report on women and children in agricultural employment.

The Art Market ⁶¹

Many artists based in Northumberland sold most of their work in the local art market. This was even the case for those artists such as Robert Jobling and Ralph Hedley who had gained a reputation outside of Northumberland and who were regular exhibitors at the Royal Academy and other galleries throughout the country. However, as Laura Newton suggests, works by Jobling, Hedley, Emmerson and Thompson, which were exhibited at venues outside of the area and in London often returned unsold and were only later sold to buyers in Northumberland. ⁶² Indeed, the local market was buoyant for painters such as Hedley, Horton- especially early in his career- and Jobling. This is in contrast to the market sought by visiting painters such as the American artist Winslow Homer.

Ralph Hedley

Hedley had started his career as an apprentice wood carver, before starting his own carving business at 22. It was this profession that generated most of the family income until his death in 1913. Pictorial art had begun as a sideline for Hedley, who utilized the skills he had learnt in Newcastle's School of Art, to produce advertisements and cartoon prints for local newspapers. He began to paint seriously in the late 1870s.

Hedley sold his work in exhibitions, both inside and less often outside the county. He was a member of the Royal Society of British Artists from 1898 and between 1887 and 1902 he exhibited every year at the Royal Academy. He was also a regular exhibitor at the Royal Institute of Watercolour Painters, Liverpool's Walker Art Gallery and from 1906 at Newcastle's Laing Art Gallery, as well as an occasional exhibitor at places as diverse as Sunderland Art Gallery, Newbury Art Society, the Royal Scottish Academy and the

⁶¹ Details of artists' sales are difficult to trace as most of the artists working in Northumberland have left no surviving personal papers. The two that that have, George Horton (1859-1950) and Ralph Hedley are therefore heavily represented in this section. Details of other artists' sales records come from the Laura Newton's research into the bequests of Robert Jobling's work to local art galleries and museums and Tony Harrison's work on Winslow Homer in Cullercoats.

⁶² Newton, *Cullercoats: A North-East Colony* p. 59.

Leeds City Art Gallery. For example, in 1898 *The Curfew Bell* (1898) and *The Skipper's Guest* (1898) were both exhibited at the South London Art Gallery, for a sale price of £63 and £105 respectively.⁶³

Sometimes, as with the Royal Hibernian Academy of Arts' 1892 exhibition, organizers would request work.⁶⁴ More often, however, Hedley had to submit a painting for consideration, as was the case at the Royal Academy. Personal connections were occasionally also important in getting his work exhibited. In a letter from H. Robinson in March 1880, Robinson promised 'I have been speaking to Willows at the ARA asking him to use his influence to get your pictures admission and I am sure I hope you may'.⁶⁵

Nevertheless, Hedley exhibited most frequently in the Northumberland. This was partly due to the fact that his work was most saleable in Northumberland and to a lesser extent in Durham, but also largely because he held powerful positions in a number of art clubs that held regular exhibitions. Hedley was president of the Tynemouth Art Club from 1891, he was made joint vice-president of the South Shields Art Club the same year, a member of the executive committee of the Northumberland Handicrafts Guild from 1900 and most importantly, president of the Bewick Club, the most prestigious of Northumberland's art clubs, from 1895. Accordingly, he exhibited at either the Bewick's Annual Exhibitions, the Exhibitions of Sketches or the Members' Exhibitions, every year from 1885 to 1897, when the club ran into financial difficulties and then again every year from 1900 to 1910, with the exception of 1902. Furthermore, he usually exhibited more than one painting. For example, he exhibited four pictures at the club's Annual Exhibition in 1890, four the following year, three in 1892 and again four in 1893. Over the same period he exhibited four paintings in Tynemouth and five in South Shields.⁶⁶

The local exhibitions were where most of Hedley's work was sold. For example, in 1896 *The Veteran* (1896) was sent to the Royal Academy Exhibition, despite the fact that it had already been bought by the shipping magnate J. Wigham Richardson, who had likely seen the painting at that year's Bewick Club

⁶³ The South London Art Gallery, *Catalogue for Exhibition of Paintings by the Members of the Royal Society of British Artists* (London, 1898).

⁶⁴ Card for Hedley from the Royal Hibernian Academy of Arts, RHA, TWCMS. 2004.2468.

⁶⁵ H. Robinson to Ralph Hedley, 27 March 1880, RHA, 2005.45

⁶⁶ All figures from exhibition lists in John Millard, *Ralph Hedley*, p.p. 101-2.

Members' Exhibition. At the 1896 Bewick Club Annual Exhibition, Hedley exhibited four paintings, three of these were bought locally; despite the fact that two were exhibited elsewhere later that year; *The Saw Pit* (1896), which was bought by A. B. Wilson, the brother to Hedley's solicitor and *Duty Paid* (1896) which was bought by the Sunderland Art Gallery before it was sent to the Royal Academy Exhibition. *Invention of the Lifeboat, Willie Woodhave, South Shields, 1789* (1896) was also sent to that year's Royal Academy Exhibition, but only after it had been bought by the Corporation of South Shields. The fourth, *Passing the Doctor* (1896), was unsold after the Bewick Club Exhibition; however, in addition to the copyright having been sold to a printing company in Nottingham, chromolithographs of the original was sold through the *Newcastle Daily Leader*.

As well as selling his paintings at exhibitions, Hedley fulfilled private commissions, which were often the result of his being recommended by existing customers or friends. Hedley's solicitor, John George Wilson, who lived in Durham City, was also a keen collector of his work. For example, In 1889 Wilson asked Hedley to paint figure pictures for him to the value of £100.⁶⁷ Wilson also bought *The Threshing Floor* (1898), *The Tithe Barn* (1902) and *The Press Gang* (1901). Indeed, Hedley's personal accounts were littered with the details of sales to Wilson. Wilson also managed to put Hedley in contact with other possible collectors, such as in 1883 when Wilson procured a commission for Hedley to paint a family dog for a friend, which could be given as a present to a cousin. As Wilson explained in a letter to Hedley: 'I also thought the introduction might be a good one for you ... when he settles down at Walworth ... you might be very likely to get painting commissions from him'.⁶⁸

For all his extensive connections outside of the area, the *Northern Mail* could still comment in 1913, in an article about the feasibility of a Hedley exhibition at the Laing, that 'many of the best of them [his pictures] are still to be found in our district'.⁶⁹ Many of these were in the possession of Hedley's executors, who contributed 42 of his paintings to the Laing's 1938 exhibition.⁷⁰ The family kept some and paintings of

⁶⁷ John George Wilson to Ralph Hedley, 14 May 1889, RHA, 2005.418.10

⁶⁸ John George Wilson to Ralph Hedley, 8 September 1883, RHA, 2005.418.12.

⁶⁹ *Northern Mail*, 29 July 1913.

⁷⁰ Laing Art Gallery and Museum, *Catalogue of the Loan Exhibition of Works by Ralph Hedley R.B.A* (Newcastle, 1938), n.p.

Hedley's children were hung in the bedrooms of his widow's house.⁷¹ Local men loaned other paintings in the 1938 exhibition. Summers Hunter, who was born in Tynemouth in 1890, lent four paintings, including *The Frithstool, Hexham Abbey* (1905) and a portrait of himself, *Summers Hunter* (1905). Similarly, Awyn William Gilbert, a native of Newcastle, lent three paintings, including a portrait of his father John William Dyson, a fellow artist. Incidentally, another local artist, Thomas Bowman Garvie, lent two Hedley woodcuts. The founder of Rutherford College lent *Geordie Ha'ad the Bairn* (1890) and Sunderland Art Gallery lent *The Smithy, Hexham Bridge End* (1885).

George Horton

George Horton's market was to become international by the early twentieth century. Horton first secured international prominence in Holland, where he lived for 20 years—from roughly 1900—and France. The Greatorex Gallery catalogue noted: 'the Dutch connoisseurs enriched their collections with the choicest of his works'.⁷² He was a member of the International Society of Watercolourists and indeed his work was 'valued all over the world, particularly in France and Holland'.⁷³ His work later gained fame in London, where he moved in 1920, through a one-man exhibition at the Greatorex Gallery in 1922. By 1932 his work *North Shields on Tyne from Dockwray Square* (n.d.) was priced at £50 by the Royal Academy.⁷⁴

However, in the 1880s and 1890s only the patrons on Tyneside, who were to become avid collectors of his work later in his career, supported his work. Horton himself later noted that 'if patronage was limited in the hard-working town of South Shields ... that which I received in the north cheered me greatly'.⁷⁵ His first major commission came to him from Aaron Watson the art critic and then editor of the *South Shields Gazette*, who asked Horton to paint scenes from along the river Tees and bought an early painting by Horton, called *The Bait Gatherers* (n.d.).⁷⁶ Indeed, this commission was attained partly because Watson had previously bought a Horton painting that subsequently sold for four times the price that Watson had

⁷¹ Handwritten catalogue of Hedley's works kept at his home, RAH, 2005.

⁷² Greatorex Gallery, Drawings by George Horton at the Greatorex Galleries 14, Grafton Street, London W.1. on Tuesday May 9 1922 (London, 1922), n.p.

⁷³ Undated and untitled newspaper extract in 'newspaper cuttings and other information about George Horton' in GHA., TWAS., 4106/6.

⁷⁴ *Shields' Gazette*, 13 May 1935.

⁷⁵ Horton's Writings (Unsorted), GHA., DF.HOR 4106/9-10 bundle 1.

⁷⁶ Idem.

paid.⁷⁷ Similarly, William Taylor bought a painting for 30 shillings when Horton was 'very poor'.⁷⁸ An early way Horton profited by his art was to encourage 30 of his friends to purchase commissions for 20 shillings of local scenes from him and pay one shilling a week.⁷⁹ His work quickly became popular on Tyneside and early in his career an art shop in Newcastle's Northumberland Street sold some of his work for roughly 30 guineas, which some onlookers thought was too cheap.⁸⁰ Indeed, in 1905 some of Horton's work was insured against fire damage for between £25 and £35 per piece.⁸¹

However, Horton's income from art sales in Northumberland chiefly relied on 'a few people at the top of society', for Horton at least 'the public [were] of no use ... they never [had] the money' to buy his paintings, and he was not prepared to paint like Birkett Foster, whose paintings were, in Horton's view, 'so valuable' because 'they are pleasant to live with ... [but] have none of the elements of greatness'.⁸² Indeed, many of Horton's largest collectors were wealthy men based in Northumberland, or patrons who had come to know him during his time in the county. The journalists, art critics and amateur artists William and W.J.G. Redpath were both avid collectors. At the 1934 Northumberland exhibition of Horton, Garvie and John Falconer Slater (1857-1937) the father and son sent 13 pictures.⁸³ The Redpaths were personal friends of Horton and the younger Horton had hoped to write Horton's biography when he retired however in the event 'it was never written'.⁸⁴

Aaron Watson, one of Horton's earliest supporters, remained a collector, as did other members of his family. Watson noted in a letter to Horton that 'my problem is to get room on these walls for all the

⁷⁷ Horton's Writings (Unsorted), GHA., DF.HOR 4106/9-10 bundle 7.

⁷⁸ George Horton to William Stephenson, 12 May 1943, Unlisted Material-Letters from Horton to 'Billy', GHA., DF.HOR 4106/18.

⁷⁹ Horton's Writings (Unsorted), GHA., DF.HOR 4106/9-10 bundle 7.

⁸⁰ Horton's Writings (Unsorted), GHA., DF.HOR 4106/9-10 bundle 11.

⁸¹ Paintings mentioned included *Bernard Castle* (n.d.) for £25, *Autumn* (n.d.) for £35 and *Ryton Boat* (n.d.) for £35. The Liverpool and London and Globe Insurance Company, *Fire Policy 7, 146, 148* in Packets of Exhibition Catalogues and Various Oddments, GHA., DF.HOR 4106/12.

⁸² Horton's Writings (Unsorted), GHA., DF.HOR 4106/9-10 bundle 6.

⁸³ Laing Art Gallery and Museum, *Catalogue of the Loan Exhibition of Works by Frank T. Carter, George Horton, T. B. Garvie, John F. Slater* (Newcastle, 1934).

⁸⁴ David Redpath, *Letter that Reveal the Personality of the Artist by David Redpath* (n.d.) no page number in Material for Exhibition Based on Redpath Family's Collection of Horton Works, GHA., DF.HOR 4106/19.

pictures I have'.⁸⁵ For example, a letter from September 1934 revealed that Watson received a drawing of Briar Dene and an unnamed oil painting. The letter mentioned that Watson already owned a painting of Grasmere Church and 'some Wateridge drawings'.⁸⁶ Two years earlier Arthur Watson offered Horton 10 guineas for a painting of Stoke Newington Church.⁸⁷ Similarly, Sir Alfred Watson had more than twenty Horton etchings.⁸⁸

Smaller collections were also based in Northumberland. For example, an undated newspaper report stated that 'perhaps the finest collection of Mr. Horton's watercolours was acquired by George R. Smith, the South Shields architect'.⁸⁹ H. W. Bennett, 'a former superintendent of [South Shields'] Marine Parks' owned 'some choice Hortons'.⁹⁰ Similarly, Isa Forster wrote to Horton in 1924 'all our married life your pictures have been on our walls in almost every room'.⁹¹ Northumberland female artist Virginia Scott mentioned that she had six Horton pictures of North Shields, Tynemouth and Gateshead.⁹² Minnie Blake of Axwell Park, Blaydon, had at least two etchings.⁹³ Similarly, according to Laura Newton's research many of Horton's works were in the collection of a 'North Shields foreman called Herbert Hué' who owned *Winter, Clive Street* (n.d.), *J.R. Hogg's Shop* (n.d.) and *Kilcaldy Arms* (n.d.) as well as *In Holland* (n.d.).⁹⁴ Horton kept up a correspondence with a Gosforth picture dealer into the 1940s and as early as 1923 a letter from R. W. Liddle of North Shields advised Horton to 'stick out for good prices and you are likely to get it,

⁸⁵ Arthur Watson to George Horton, 26 September 1934, Letters from Watson Family, GHA., DF.HOR 4106/11a.

⁸⁶ Arthur Watson to George Horton, 3 September 1934, Letters from Watson Family, GHA., DF.HOR 4106/11a.

⁸⁷ Arthur Watson to George Horton, 16 December 1932, Letters from Watson Family, GHA., DF.HOR 4106/11a.

⁸⁸ Sir Alfred Watson to George Horton, undated, Letters from Watson Family, GHA., DF.HOR 4106/11a.

⁸⁹ Undated and untitled newspaper cutting, Newspaper Cuttings and other Information about George Horton, GHA., DF.HOR 4106/6.

⁹⁰ *Idem*.

⁹¹ Isa Forster to George Horton, 23 November 1924, Packet of Letters to Horton, unsorted, GHA., DF.HOR4106/3.

⁹² Virginia Scott to George Horton, undated, Interesting Letters from a Variety of People, GHA., DF.HOR4106/11/1.

⁹³ Minnie Blake to George Horton, 9 September 1948, Interesting Letters from a Variety of People, GHA., DF.HOR4106/11/1.

⁹⁴ Newton, 'The Cullercoats Artists' Colony', p. 145.

as you have not made your pictures so common as many of the local men have done. The town is simply flooded with Rainbird pictures just now'.⁹⁵

In 1922 the *American Art News* asserted that Horton 'has neglected to introduce his drawings to the land of his birth'.⁹⁶ However, it would seem as if the magazine was referring to a lack of notoriety in London, as Horton's works had been widely exhibited in Northumberland before his Greatorex show in 1922. Local galleries were also keen to exhibit Horton's work. The first picture he exhibited was *Harrowed Fields* (n.d.) in 1881 at the Newcastle Arts Association and he exhibited there the following year.⁹⁷ Similarly, he exhibited *Morning Light* (n.d.) at the Bewick Club in 1884 and he exhibited consistently at the club over the next eight years. The Emmerson exhibition in South Shields in 1894 contained 16 of Horton's works, alongside 24 of Emmerson's, 11 by Robert Watson and one by Robert Jobling.⁹⁸ The Laing Art Gallery's Artists of the North Counties Exhibitions exhibited many of Horton's works early in the twentieth century.

Robert Jobling

Jobling had some wealthy patrons in the county and its environs, whose patronage supplemented his commissioned illustrative work for serial publications such as *The Graphic*, the *Art Journal*, *The English Illustrated Magazine* and *Tyneside* as well as books such as *Newcastle Town* and *Rivers of Great Britain*. According to Laura Newton Jobling's patrons included Lord Armstrong, Charles Mitchell who had fifteen Joblings at the time of his death, W.J. Noble, Honorary Secretary of the Newcastle Liberal Association, Sir A. M. Sutherland, the Earl of Carlisle Thomas Reed, a local accountant, G.E. Henderson, Julia Boyd and Charles Williams.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ R. W. Liddle to George Horton, 30 July 1923, Packet of Letters to Horton, unsorted, GHA., DF.HOR4106/3.

⁹⁶ *American Art News*, June 3 1922, Newspaper Cuttings and Other Information about George Horton, GHA., DF.HOR 4106/6.

⁹⁷ Marshall Hall, *The Artists of Northumbria: An Illustrated Dictionary of Northumberland, Newcastle upon Tyne, Durham and North East Yorkshire Painters, Sculptors, Engravers, Stained Glass Designers, Illustrators, Caricaturists and Cartoonists born Between 1625 and 1950* (Bristol, 2003), p. 175.

⁹⁸ South Shields Art Club, *Emmerson Exhibition of Oil Paintings together with Some Works by North Country and Other Notable Artists* (South Shields, 1894).

⁹⁹ Charles Mitchell figures from Anderson and Garland, *Catalogue of Paintings &c, Auctioned at Jesmond Towers* (Newcastle, 1926).

Winslow Homer

Other artists concentrated more on markets outside of the region. For example, Winslow Homer, who lived in the area for two years between 1881 and 1883, painted many of the most famous depictions of Cullercoats. However, Homer's market was in America and most of his Cullercoats' work was, according to George Horton, 'saved' and used to form the basis of a one man exhibition when he returned to home, from which he 'made a fortune', or else shipped to Boston on completion.¹⁰⁰ By contrast, his engagement with Northumberland's art market was minimal. He displayed one picture, indicated in the catalogue as *Cullercoats* (n.d.) at the Arts Association exhibition of 1881. The extent of his patronage in Northumberland remains unclear, although it was probably relatively insignificant. Homer did however sell *A Fisherman's Family Awaiting the Return of the Boat* (1881) to William Cochrane, a local mine owner, in December 1881. Tony Harrison, in his study of Homer's time in England, also suggests that because Homer had been introduced to the county's most important patron, Lord Armstrong that he may also have sold some of his work to him. However, much of the evidence suggests that Homer was removed from the art world of Northumberland. Harrison asserts that Homer had 'a persistent desire for solitude'¹⁰¹ and although happy in the company of the 'homely folk of walnut grain'¹⁰² he met in Cullercoats, he nevertheless 'held himself aloof from other artists'.¹⁰³

Market clearly had some bearing on artistic output. Homer, for example, produced works with little reference to a sense of place. Indeed, most of his Cullercoats' scenes were set on the sands, or on the cliffs above the sands and bear striking resemblance to his later depictions of Maine scenery, for example, *High Cliff, Coat of Maine* (1894) and *Watching the Breakers* (1891). Similarly, his painting *Early Evening* (1907) was begun during his time in Cullercoats but later reworked. In this painting, he left the images of the two central female figures in their Cullercoats' costumes, whilst re-painting the background to better resemble the Maine coastline. This is unsurprising given that he sold most of his work to an American audience.

¹⁰⁰ Horton's writings (unsorted), GHA., DF.HOR 4106/9-10, bundle 5.

¹⁰¹ Harrison, *Winslow Homer in England*, p. 25.

¹⁰² *Idem.*

¹⁰³ *Idem.*

In a similar way artists such as Hedley and Horton were clearly able to make the most of geographical and social detail because of the strength of a local market who would be more aware of the nuances of the work and may have been just as keen to buy works because of their local subject or location as on their style or merit. However, the market did not dictate subject matter or theme. Jobling and Emmerson sold well in the county and the themes in their works were in keeping with conventional social notions and perhaps even celebrations of 'Englishness'.

Conventional Depictions of Northumberland

Although the buoyancy of the local market allowed some artists to address local conditions and although through Naturalism local geographical details were often in evidence, some artists produced paintings that were highly conventional in theme. As much of the historiography agrees, most of the artistic output from England's coastal colonies was strikingly similar. Much of what was painted concentrated on the 'heroic battle[s]' ¹⁰⁴ of the fishing communities in their 'pre-industrial way of life'. ¹⁰⁵ Within this gender relations were often highly conventional and were best described as 'the stoic suffering of ... women ... [and] the bravery of their men folk'. ¹⁰⁶ There is also a consensus amongst historians such as Newton, Lübbren and McConkey that these heroic depictions were meant to embody national 'heroic' qualities and as such were a celebration of Englishness. The work of artists such as Marsh and Jobling certainly owes much to these conventional themes of heroism and traditionally defined gender roles. Whether or not these were deliberately pictures celebrating 'Englishness' is more problematic, especially as Jobling's paintings in particular owed much to the work of the American artist Homer.

Quite conventionally, Jobling's paintings often concentrated on the theme of rescue and danger at sea. Such scenes emphasized adverse conditions, physical toil and flurrying activity, for example in *The Lifeboat Off* (1884) and later *Launching the Cullercoats Lifeboat* (1902). These paintings were very similar in terms of their attitudes to the physically heroic fishermen to paintings such as *The Last Cobble* (1900) by Harold Knight (1874-1961), with whom Jobling was personally familiar and Walter Langley's (1852-1922)

¹⁰⁴ McConkey, *Memory and Desire*, p. 109.

¹⁰⁵ Newton, *Painting at the Edge*, p. 123.

¹⁰⁶ *Idem*.

Disaster-Scene in a Cornish Fishing Village (1889). Similarly, Jobling's paintings of stoic female patience in the face of impending disaster, such as *Hauling the Boats* (1890) and *Anxious Times* (1889) and Marsh's *Lighting the Beacon* (1887) were similar to works like *Departure of the Fleet for the North* (1886) and *Among the Missing-Scene in a Cornish Fishing Village* (1884), both by Walter Langley.



Heroism in 4.9 detail from Robert Jobling *The Lifeboat Off* (1884) showing the similarities of physical heroism to 4.10 Harold Knight's *The Last Cobble* (1900).

The types of 'heroism' depicted by the colonists were often differentiated along gender lines. For many of the colonists male bravery was depicted as physical, active and engaged with nature and the sea. Female heroism was often also depicted against a backdrop of physically adverse conditions but tended to concentrate on women's stoic anxiety for the male fishermen. Tellingly, Marsh's *Lighting the Beacon* (1887) was originally exhibited as *Men Must Work Women and Must Weep* and this seemed to aptly describe the conventional gender relations in depictions by coastal colonists. Indeed, Marsh's depictions of gender relations in both Cullercoats and the rural areas of Northumberland were highly conventional and stressed the active and public male and the passive domestic female as 'ideal' gender roles. In *The Wayfarers* (1879), he depicted a destitute and itinerant female labourer trying to shelter out of the evening cold. The presence of her child, but not her husband in the picture, pointed the viewer to the moral lesson to be drawn from the work. The labour of females, or more specifically mothers in their ideal female state, could only be viewed by Marsh as an evil necessity, which occurred when the correct male-female relationship had been broken by male desertion or female promiscuity. He treated the same theme in a

similar manner in *The Turnip Cutter* (1902), which showed a woman and her daughter working early in the morning, or late at night, alone and outside. This picture certainly was not conceived as a celebration of female labour, as it emphasized the uncomfortable surroundings and the endlessness of the task-in the huge pile of turnips yet to be cut. There is none of the defiant dignity of female rural labour shown in Clausen's early depictions of Susan Chapman. In contrast to these, Marsh's *The Ploughman Homeward Plods his Weary Way* (n.d.) and *The Worker* (n.d.) depicted the male breadwinner returning home from a day's physical work. In this painting Marsh painted the man standing on the threshold of his home, illuminated from behind, with his pick held aloft as a sign both of his work and his masculinity.



The conventional gender relations depicted in Arthur Marsh's work. Above: 4.11 *The Wayfarers* (1879) and 4.12 *The Turnip Cutter* (1902), Below: 4.13 *The Worker* (n.d.) and 4.14 *The Ploughman Homeward Plods his Weary Way* (n.d.)



Other artists associated with the Cullercoats Colony depicted gender relations in this conventional manner. For example, Jobling's *Anxious Times* and *Hauling the Boats* show female passivity. Emmerson's painting *Bereaved* depicts the appropriate female response to disaster. In this picture Emmerson's female figures are all inside whilst the male funeral cortege is outside. That this was a conventional depiction of appropriate female grief was highlighted by its striking similarity to Frank Bramley's (1857-1915) *A Hopeless Dawn* (1888).



4.15 Henry Hetherington Emmerson *Bereaved* (1888) showing its similarity to 4.16 Frank Bramley's *A Hopeless Dawn* (1888).

Newton argues of the Cullercoats paintings that in ‘counterbalance to the site-specificity of many of the images ... [there was a] nationalistic message ... reflecting the nation’s manhood and ... glory’.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, this is a reasonable suggestion given the thematic similarities of heroism and gender relations between the works of some Cullercoats artists and the artists in colonies elsewhere. However, one should not dismiss the influence of earlier painters in Northumberland in shaping the output of those at Cullercoats. For example, Henry Perlee Parker in the 1820s and 1830s had painted many scenes of coastal life in Cullercoats, in the form of smugglers, pirates, fishermen and local characters. Indeed, paintings such as *The Fisherman* (n.d.) were similar in content to the later Cullercoats pictures and his sketches of fishermen show the same attention to specific detail of local dress as the later works.



Henry Perlee Parker’s paintings of local fishermen, 4.17 *The Fisherman* (n.d.) and 4.18 *A Cullercoats Fisherman* (1820-1840)

Furthermore, the work of Jobling and Marsh were obviously heavily influenced by the work of American artist Winslow Homer. Not only did Homer present the same views of ‘heroic’ life, he also depicted this heroism along strictly gendered lines. The Washington’s National Gallery of Art describes Homer’s view of male and female roles in his pictures of fisherwomen by explaining:

¹⁰⁷ Newton, ‘The Cullercoats Artists’ Colony’, p. 185.

Homer had almost always set up an emphatic juxtaposition between the role of women on the shore and that of the men on the sea. As the women determinedly went about their own business, confronted with the inexorable prospect of separation and loss, the men faced tangible physical peril in their constant battle with the elements.¹⁰⁸

This attitude was present in most of his depictions of Cullercoats' women, in which he emphasized women's domestic role and also casts them as the passive watchers of the sea, anxiously awaiting their husbands' return. For example, *Looking out to Sea*, (1881) and *Fishwives* (1883) were typical depictions of the anxious wife. The domestic nature of female employment was emphasized in paintings such as *Enjoying the Breeze* (1882/1884) *Early Evening* (1881-1907) and *Mending the Nets* (1882). Although these paintings showed women mending fishing nets, which was in reality, a physically demanding task, Homer represented it as a pleasant past time and an accompaniment to idle chatter, no more strenuous than needlework. Indeed, Homer's treatment of all female labour is of this nature. Even when, as in *Fisherwomen, Cullercoats* (1881), Homer showed fisherwomen carrying large baskets, which were typically filled with between four and six stones of fish, they are rarely shown to be exhausted, or even troubled by the exertion. Just as the gender relations in Homer's paintings of Cullercoats re-appeared in later pictures of the area, there were similarities in painting style and the attitudes of painted figures between Homer and Marsh and Jobling.

¹⁰⁸ Washington National Gallery of Art. *Winslow Homer at the National Gallery of Art. Online Tour.* (Washington D.C., 2007). at www.nga.gov/feature/homer/homer17.htm accessed 2 January, 2007.



Similarities between Robert Jobling and Winslow Homer's work. Above: 4.19 Robert Jobling's *Anxious Times* (1889) and 4.20 Winslow Homer's *Perils of the Sea* (1881). Below: 4.21 Robert Jobling's *Launching the Cullercoats Lifeboat* (1902) and 4.22 Winslow Homer's *Watching the Tempest* (1881).



Obviously some Cullercoats painters chose not to concentrate and comment upon local society and geography beyond superficial references to local topography or clothing. The works of Jobling and Marsh in particular were similar to contemporary depictions of fishing communities around the country and concentrated upon the same themes of heroism from within the same sets of gender assumptions. The historiography asserts that such displays of heroism were bound up with the celebration of national identity. Given the similarities between the Cullercoats work and that of other English artists there is clearly some truth to this assertion. However, there were, just as clearly, some influences on the Cullercoats artists of the

1880s and 1890s, which came from artists working in the county, who because of generation or nationality, were unlikely to have been too interested in celebrating 'Englishness'.

Conclusion

The historiography holds that by the 1890s rural and coastal scenes were intimately bound up by notions of 'Englishness' and whereas this meant the domination of south-eastern scenes in rural art, there was much more geographical diversity in the pictures of fishing communities. However, one can see from a study of Northumberland art that the issue was more problematic. Artists such as Horton, Charlton, Hedley and Jobling had responded to the Naturalist demand for superficial local detail in their work and more significantly some, especially Hedley, Gilroy and Charlton, had taken local social details, such as gender relations and incorporated into their work as the mark of the 'insider' artist. Even Emmerson, whose work was sometimes a mixture of local detail and contemporary social mores, painted himself as a member of the funeral cortege in *Bereaved*. Even into the 1890s and early 1900s some Northumberland artists were still using Naturalism to depict the local difference Nochlin notes in the work of Courbet and Oller.

The local market for works by artists such as Hedley, Horton and Jobling was strong and as such artists were able to make the most of the use of local geographical and social specificity in their works, especially as Naturalist paintings were meant to be understood by the types of people who featured as models. However, although the market was clearly an important facilitator for the productions of such work, it did not dictate artists' output. As the next chapter will demonstrate Northumberland artists were experiencing unprecedented confidence in their role by the end of the century and so felt able to follow their own instincts in their choice of subject matter and theme. Jobling and Marsh in particular restricted their sense of place to superficial detail and in all other respects were conventional in their depictions of heroism and gender relations. Although this likely had something to do with a wish to celebrate or comment upon 'Englishness' it is unwise to solely note the influences of artists in other parts of the country on their work and it is important to realise that many features of their depictions were also likely influenced by artists who had worked in the region and were unlikely to have been interested in 'Englishness'.

Artistic interest in the depictions of Northumberland had little to do with promotion of the county to the outside world, as Cullercoats artists tended not to send large numbers of paintings to London and the local art market sustained local artists to a large extent. Their interest in Northumberland was partly at least likely to have been due to the demands of the local market and partly due to an adherence to Naturalism and Realism which compelled them to focus on their immediate surroundings.

Social situations can only go so far in their explanations of art works. It seems likely therefore that difference in approach was best explained by differences in character and temperament, especially as most of the artists relied on the same market. However, what can be concluded with confidence is that the work of Northumberland artists in the 1880s and 1890s did not constitute an attempt to reinvent Northumberland's identity through a policy of neutralization by inclusion. Artists were able to draw on the artistic and social traditions of the county, see themselves as insiders and revel in local topography. Indeed, the next chapter will show that, from the 1880s, a central part of their artistic identity came from their geographic location.

Chapter Five

Professional and County Identity amongst Art Groups, c1883-c.1905. ¹

This chapter focuses on Northumberland's art associations in the 1880s and 1890s. It demonstrates that artistic occupational self-confidence was intimately bound up with *county* identity and that class status was not the most important factor in bolstering professional identity as much of the historiography suggests. The determining factor in membership to these clubs was not class status. Clubs were primarily interested in the welfare of Northumbrian artists and much of their collective identity came from their links with Northumberland.

Victorian associational life has most consistently been viewed through the lens of class. ² As Peter Bailey notes, in one of the first wave of histories on Victorian leisure, 'in the world of recreation [class'] differentials are more striking than those of other significant social categories that have recently been explored'. ³ This in turn, according to Bailey, 'reinforced the awareness of collective class participation'. ⁴ Ronald Frankenberg places class at the forefront of associational life, when he asserts that one's class was, and is, a conscious deciding factor in club affiliation. What he notes of club membership in the twentieth century is a perfect précis of much nineteenth-century historiography: 'In sum, two main factors decide what associations a man joins, his political-religious adherence and his social status. Of these, social status is dominant'. ⁵ Raymond Williams and others differ with Frankenberg about the conscious class-based decision process, noting that 'there is a classlessness about much of the leisure pursued by different

¹ Samuel Pearson, 'H.H. Emerson: A Biographical Sketch' in *Catalogue of Emerson Exhibition held at The Galleries, 62 Grainger Street, December 1895* (Newcastle, 1895), p. 25.

² See p. p. 164-5 for a discussion of class and gallery formation in the historiography.

³ Peter Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England, Rational Recreation and the Contest for Control, 1830-1885* (London, 1978), p. 179.

⁴ Peter Bailey, "'A Mingled Mass of Perfectly Legitimate Pleasures": The Victorian Middle Class and the Problem of Leisure', *Victorian Studies* 21 (1977-78), p. 26.

⁵ Ronald Frankenberg, *Communities in Britain, Social Life in Town and Country* (Middlesex, 1966), p. 172.

people'⁶ but nevertheless '[class] is the essential idea embodied in the organizations and institutions that class creates'.⁷

The central tenets of this class-determined ethos in middle-class Victorian groups, were, according to much of the historiography, 'respectability' and the need for 'moral fitness'. Such groups are also characterized as being 'basically and relentlessly didactic'.⁸ However, historians such as Robert Gray do not imagine that this to mean that cultural capital flows exclusively from London. On the contrary, he asserts the importance of the complex relationships between the metropolis and the regions. However, despite his belief in the relative autonomy of provincial cultures, he does concede that middle-class networks in the industrial cities were part of the 'renegotiation of power and the re-imagining of the nation'.⁹ Therefore, although London may not have been the dominant cultural force for Gray, nevertheless, there was some form of middle-class cultural integration across regional borders.

Peter Quinn, working on the Bewick Club, an art association in Northumberland, has emphasized the ability of cultural capital to flow from a display of regional, rather than a middle-class identity, in Northumberland. Quinn notes the importance of naming the club after Thomas Bewick, the famous Northumbrian woodcutter. Although he sees this association as problematic for the club, nevertheless he argues that 'the artists [were] self-consciously painting themselves into a perceived tradition, occupying the ... space of the local genius and claiming his space as their own'.¹⁰ Quinn also asserts that Henry Hetherington Emmerson, the first president of the club, was in a sense 'classless'. According to Quinn, this was because Emmerson was seen as embodying the spirit of the 'true' Northumbrian artist. Such an idea had its roots in the contemporary characterization of Bewick's 'genius' as having emanated from his local-

⁶ Michael Smith, Stanley Parker and Cyril Smith (eds.), *Leisure and Society in Britain* (London, 1973), p. 19.

⁷ Raymond Williams, 'Minority and Popular Culture' in Smith, Parker, and Cyril Smith, *Leisure and Society in Britain*, p. 26.

⁸ *Idem*.

⁹ Robert Gray, 'The Platform and the Pulpit: Cultural Networks and Civic Identities in Industrial Towns c. 1850-1870', in Alan Kidd and David Nicholls (eds.), *The Making of the British Middle Class? Studies in Regional and Cultural Diversity since the Eighteenth Century* (Gloucestershire, 1998), p. 132.

¹⁰ Paul Quinn, "'Their Strongest Pine': Thomas Bewick and Regional Identity in the Late Nineteenth Century Bewick" in Bewick Society, *Bewick Studies, Essays in Celebration of the 250th Anniversary of the Birth of Thomas Bewick 1753-1828* (Northumberland, 2003), p. 125.

and therefore 'natural' and 'unsophisticated'-roots.¹¹ This modifies the argument that occupational identity was in fact a symptom of a broader middle-class identity, in two ways. Firstly, club identity may have had a local aspect and secondly part of the cultural capital to be gained from association to such groups could have come from a local, not a middle-class cultural identity flowing from London.

This chapter will advance the work of Quinn and demonstrate that not only were Northumbrian art associations established as occupational support and leisure associations and not merely as middle-class leisure clubs but also that club identity derived as much from members' geographical place as from their professional status.

The first section will emphasize the artistic identity of the clubs and highlight their purpose as artistic interest groups and recreational associations. The second section will therefore demonstrate that membership to both the Bewick Club and the Pen and Palette Club, two of the largest art and cultural associations in Northumberland, was diverse in class terms. Although most of the members were not working class, the status of those in the clubs constituted a very wide cross-section of society. Indeed, membership of these groups did not form part of a member's middle-class identity, as most members were not involved with other non-artistic clubs. The third section will highlight the local nature of the clubs, focussing on their rules for admission, Robert Spence-Watson's 1885 address to the Bewick Club, exhibitions and membership to other clubs. This will be placed in the context of other drives to celebrate and explore versions of Northumbrian history and culture, which emphasized insular but different versions of county pride.

The Local Art Scene

There were a number of artistic associations in Northumberland at the end of the nineteenth century. Immediately preceding this period the Arts Association had been the largest such institution in

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

Northumberland. The Association closed in 1883 and was replaced in the same year by the Bewick Club, whose management was opposed to the approach of the Association and wished to create a self-consciously different type of art grouping with membership based on artistic, rather than elite status. With the creation of the Bewick Club a new era in Northumberland's artistic associational life began. Smaller groups began to emerge created along the same lines. The Pen and Palette Club was established in 1903. Although it was open to 'those gentlemen professionally or specially connected with arts, literature, science or journalism',¹² the first committee of 12 comprised three professional artists, the single largest group, and one art teacher. There were also a number of smaller groups, such as the South Shields' Art Club established in 1891, the Tynemouth Art Club in c. 1891, The Art Circle in 1897 and the Northumberland Handicrafts' Guild in c. 1903.¹³

This was symptomatic of the interest in art in Northumberland and the willingness of Northumbrian artists to remain based in the county. Comparing the census information for Northumberland's artists' birthplaces to those of Cornwall, which was the site of the most famous of all Victorian coastal communities, one can see that Northumberland had a potentially much larger static artistic community and a greater percentage of that community was born in the area. According to Northumberland's 1881 census, 43% of the 73 individuals listed as 'painters' or 'artists' had been born in Northumberland.¹⁴ For Cornwall the figure was 37%, from an artistic population of only 43 individuals.¹⁵ The surprisingly small number of artists in Cornwall may be explained by the fact that many were visiting artists, present only for small time periods.

Furthermore, a higher proportion of the non-native artists based in Northumberland came from nearby counties than was the case for Cornwall. Typical artistic incomers to Cornwall came from the Home Counties, whereas incomers to Northumberland typically came from Durham and Yorkshire. Furthermore,

¹² A.G.M. Sinton. *Pen and Palette Club, the First Ninety Years 1900-1990* (n.d.), n.p.

¹³ Club papers for these latter clubs no longer exist.

¹⁴ All figures do not include photographic or lithographic artists.

¹⁵ Both the Newlyn and the Cullercoats colony did not reach the peak of their fame until the 1890s and so a comparison between this census and the 1891 and 1901 census would have been beneficial. However, although all of the censuses are online through www.ancestry.com, the 1881 census is the only one that can be searched by occupation. Therefore, such a comparison is impossible. Similarly, it would have been useful to have been able to make the distinction between where an artist was born and where they were primarily based for the period around 1881, however, the 1881 census does not provide this information.

42%, of artists born in Northumberland were still living in the county in 1881 and 12%, were in County Durham.¹⁶ 19% were based in London. In Cornwall, 38% were living in the county, 13% in Devon and 22% in London. Although the percentages are similar in these cases it is worth noting that the Northumberland-born artists mentioned in the census included the most active members of the county's art community, such as Jobling and Hedley, whereas the Cornwall-born artists mentioned in the census were largely overshadowed in importance by visiting artists working in the county.

In Northumberland, according to both the Bewick and Pen and Palette Clubs' members lists, between 1881 and 1904, there were at least 14 amateur artists involved in the artistic life of the county by virtue of their membership.¹⁷ This flourishing amateur interest is also shown in the *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, which noted of Northumberland in 1879: 'the chances are that of three people talking in the street one is an amateur artist'.¹⁸

Artistic Identity

Groups such as the Pen and Palette Club were formed to act in the interests of a section of the artistic community, not a section of the middle class. The final line of the frontispiece for the 1885, 1886 and 1888 exhibition catalogues ran: 'thine, O Man is ART-thine wholly and alone'.¹⁹ This attitude can also be seen by the open appeal to amateur artists and enthusiasts made by the president of the Pen and Palette Club, Aaron Watson, himself an amateur artist. He described the role of his club, at the inaugural dinner, as being

¹⁶ Because the census only notes where an individual was present on the day of the enumeration, not their permanent address, the following figures are not necessarily accurate, but they are strongly indicative of artists' residential patterns. Nevertheless, to produce figures which are as accurate a reflection of residential patterns as possible, individuals who are designated as 'visitors' on the census are not included.

¹⁷ The membership lists do not indicate profession, but by cross-referencing with a member's census entry, for the year nearest to the date they first appear on a membership list, one can separate the professional artists from the non-professionals. In order to make a distinction between the noted amateur and the mere enthusiast members, their names have been cross-referenced with entries in Marshall Hall, *The Artists of Northumbria: An Illustrated Dictionary of Northumberland, Newcastle upon Tyne, Durham and North East Yorkshire Painters, Sculptors, Engravers, Stained Glass Designers, Illustrators, Caricaturists and Cartoonists born Between 1625 and 1950* (Bristol, 2003). Those who were not professionals but have entries in the dictionary have been classified as 'amateurs' in this study. Those who do not have entries are henceforth referred to as 'enthusiasts'.

¹⁸ *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 5 September 1879

¹⁹ Bewick Club, *Fine Art Catalogue 1885* (Newcastle, 1885), frontispiece, *Fine Art Catalogue 1886* (Newcastle, 1886), frontispiece and *Fine Art Catalogue 1888* (Newcastle, 1888), frontispiece. Capitalization as in original.

‘a kind of forum for men of various callings but kindred tastes, [who] wished to make a little sheltered place where they might meet and enjoy each other’s company: encourage each other if need be and, by chance, when the occasion offered, do some work for the world’.²⁰ This account of the aims of the club accorded with the composition of the group, which was heavily skewed towards the art enthusiast. The activities of the Pen and Palette were not focused around philanthropic community initiatives, but towards artistic and recreational pursuits through regular talks and musical evenings. George Horton emphasized the club’s recreational role when he wrote ‘every weekend brought someone of eminence to have their pot pie supper with mushrooms’.²¹ Amusingly, his reminiscences also include a story about Horton’s drunken fight with a friend in the club rooms, in order that the friend could demonstrate his prowess with a bayonet.²²

Just as the Pen and Palette sought to be a group for the amateur and enthusiast, so the Bewick Club became an important interest group for professional artists. On the committee there were 19 members, of which the president and three vice-presidents had to be, according to the Articles of Association, painters by profession. The Articles also stipulated that at least six of the other members, and the honorary secretary and treasurer, be chosen from the art council, membership of which was predicated on being a professional artist. Therefore, at the very least, 10 of the 19 members of the committee were required to be professional artists and therefore they had the majority vote. In addition to this the art council was entrusted to ‘select, hang and arrange pictures’ at exhibitions, ‘give lectures and hold classes’ and ‘manage all matters connected to art in the club’.²³ This wide remit would suggest that the professionals on the council were supposed to lead in all matters, except for those which were purely supportive of their work, such as dealing with legal and financial issues. The high percentage of professional artists in the Bewick Club can be best seen in figure 5.1.

²⁰ Charles Williams, *Pen and Palette Club Retrospective, 1900-1921* (Newcastle, 1922), p. 1.

²¹ Horton’s writings (unsorted), DF.HOR 4106/9-10, bundle 6. GHA.

²² Horton’s writings (unsorted), GHA., DF.HOR 4106/9-10, bundle 1.

²³ Bewick Club, *Articles of Association* (Newcastle, 1892), p. 24.

5.1 The Employment of Bewick Club Members who joined in 1884²⁴

Professional Artist	32
Associated Professional ²⁵	8
Amateurs and Enthusiasts	21
Unknown	22

The Bewick Club's primary function was to promote the needs of these professional artists; namely, it sought to offer artists encouragement beyond that afforded by the patronage of individuals. The club had been established in self-conscious reaction to the Arts Association, which had provoked angry reaction from local artists, when exhibitions dedicated little space to their work of local artists. Sympathetic response in the press was vitriolic. For example, the *Daily Chronicle* noted that the Arts Association had 'come a cropper' by ignoring local artists and was 'more suitable for the aristocrats who can pay a guinea for a season ticket, than for our young local artists.'²⁶ The club therefore aimed to put matters of artistic cultivation under the direction of artists rather than patrons, with the focus on the work of the local producer, rather than the foreign Master. The club also aimed to 'take art out of the hands of the rich'.²⁷ This, most likely, was a statement aimed at the Arts Association, because those on the committee for the Arts Association were wealthy men of industry. However, it was unlikely to have been a purely ideological stance. Given the non-aristocratic art market from which the Bewick Club artists most often benefited, this strategy aided their commercial success.²⁸

The Bewick Club had many economic advantages to offer the professional artist. As well as the opportunity to teach in the club's art classes, there were also opportunities to negotiate private contracts with the club for work, as Ralph Hedley did when his workshop supplied carving works to the club's premises whilst

²⁴ The Bewick Club members were taken from the subscription list in Bewick Club, *Newcastle upon Tyne Fine Art Exhibition 1884* (Newcastle, 1884), n.p. Occupations were then taken from the 1881 census: www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/census, accessed 5 December 2005.

²⁵ Occupations include architects, sculptors, printers, engravers and designers.

²⁶ *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 5 September 1879.

²⁷ Newcastle Art Union, *Report of Committee 1885*, (Newcastle, 1885), p. 4 and p. 7.

²⁸ See chapter four.

president. Useful contacts could also be made by members. Hedley's personal account books show that he had also been given commissions by fellow members. For example, he painted Alderman Newton's portrait in 1901 and was paid £127 5d.²⁹ The chance to display work at regular exhibitions that were consistently covered by the local press, was perhaps the greatest advantage to the membership. Despite the altruistic aims of the Bewick Club to be an association 'for the advancement and cultivation of the fine arts' its first loyalty was to the promotion of those who were members.³⁰ For example, when the club ran into financial difficulties in the 1890s, submissions to the exhibitions were closed to all but members. Indeed, the Articles of Association stated that 'no work contributed [to an exhibition] by a ... member ... shall be liable to rejection on any grounds whatsoever'.³¹ Indeed, the exhibitions were an important source of revenue for artists. Ralph Hedley, for example, made £115 4s worth of sales through the Bewick Club in 1905.³²

Furthermore, the Bewick Club had mechanisms in place to help professional artists facing financial hardship. Point IV (6) of the Articles of Association noted that: 'grants of money by the club [can be made to] deserving painters ... whether in the club or not, who are in indignant circumstances'.³³ The club therefore, seemingly felt a responsibility to all professional artists in the area and sought to preserve their individual dignity and worth. Clubs such as the Pen and Palette and the Bewick Club were formed for the interests of certain sections of the artistic community and promoted their interests and needs, rather than the perceived needs of the wider community or the area's working-class population.

Although prominent members were unlikely to be involved with non-artistic groups in the local area, many were involved in other artistic associations. For example, Thomas Dickinson (1853-1906) was the first secretary of the Bewick Club, as well as a founding member of the Pen and Palette. John George Sowerby (1850-1914) was a member of the Bewick Club, the Arts Association and the South Shields Art Club. Ralph Hedley was the second president of the Bewick Club, the first vice president of the South Shields Art Club and the president of the Tynemouth Art Club. Henry Emmerson was the first president of the Bewick

²⁹ Personal Account Book, RHL, DT/RH, n.p.

³⁰ Bewick Club, *Newcastle upon Tyne Fine Art Exhibition 1884*, n.p.

³¹ Bewick Club, *Bewick Club Articles of Association*, p. 24.

³² Personal Account Book, RHL, DT/RH, n.p.

³³ Bewick Club, *Bewick Club Articles of Association*, p. 6.

Club and vice president of the South Shields Art Club. Most notable, however, was the role of Robert Jobling, who was involved in all of these major art groups, often holding important positions within them. He was the first vice president of the Bewick Club, involved in the South Shields Art Club and founding member of the Pen and Palette Club. John Surtees (1819-1915) was a member of both the Bewick Club and the South Shields Art Club, as was George Waterston (b.1858). John Falconer Slater (1858-1937) was a member of the Bewick Club and the Whitley Bay Art Club. Only two non-artists had multiple memberships, Johnson Hedley, Ralph Hedley's brother and Charles William Mitchell, whose father had bankrolled the Arts Association. However, he was also a very successful and nationally recognized amateur painter. The *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*'s obituary noted that, 'he probably would have risen to eminence had he been born in less affluent circumstances'.³⁴

The Broad Class Spectrum of Club Membership

Dianne Macleod notes that 'the homogeneity of taste in Newcastle ... was achieved by the unusually close-knit relationships enjoyed by members of the local business class'.³⁵ However, what Macleod notes of art collectors in the 1870s cannot be translated to art producers and cultural enthusiasts in the 1880s and 1890s. The individuals involved in the Bewick and the Pen and Palette, came from a wide spectrum of the area's middle class. Indeed, most were from a broadly middle-class background, but the economic differences between and within groups like the Bewick and Pen and Palette, underline the point that these groups did not constitute a united class front. Furthermore, trying to fit the behaviour of art associations into a wider class framework is unhelpful given the small numbers involved. These art clubs were groupings of local artists and enthusiasts and therefore this was reflected in their relatively small membership numbers. Furthermore, as will be demonstrated later in the section, the small memberships were often enforced by the rules of the club, which envisaged their groups as exclusive creative or art-centred, associations.

³⁴ *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 1 March 1903.

³⁵ Dianne Macleod, 'Private and Public Patronage Victorian Newcastle', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 52 (1989), p. 205.

5.2 Employment Composition of the Bewick and Pen and Palette Clubs between 1884 and 1901³⁶

Profession	Bewick Club	Pen and Palette
Painters ³⁷	16	3
Artistic Occupations ³⁸	4	5
Clerical Positions	7	1
Doctors and Surgeons	0	4
The Press	1	2
Brokers	3	0
Manufacturers	2	0
Engineers	2	0
Living on Own Means	2	1
Shopkeepers	4	0
Merchants	1	0
Academics	0	6
Financial Professionals	1	4
Other	6	4

From figure 5.2, one can see that there were significant occupational differences between the memberships of the two groups. The Pen and Palette attracted a high percentage of professionals, 14 in total, including academics, doctors and financial professionals. Those involved in the Bewick Club more easily fit into Macleod's description of the 'business class' and yet they can hardly be said to have been 'close knit' in the economic sense, when one considers that there were seven in clerical positions and almost as many manufacturers and brokers. Similarly, in the Bewick Club the distribution and service industries were represented, in the form of both shopkeepers and merchants, in a way that they were not in the Pen and Palette. Indeed, from a socio-economic perspective; professionally, the membership of the Pen and Palette

³⁶ Employment details were taken from the census of 1881, 1891 and 1901. The census used for each member was that which was closest to the date that they joined their club.

³⁷ This includes those enumerated by the censor as being artists, painters and art masters.

³⁸ This includes those enumerated by the censor as being architects, sculptors, printers, engravers, carvers and designers.

was mostly drawn from the professional groups of class one, whereas, the members of the Bewick Club were mostly drawn from classes two and three. However, there were also some notably wealthy members of the Bewick Club, who helped to vary the social and economic standing of the membership. Adam Carse was a local councillor and Dr Henry Newton Newcastle's mayor. There was also the newspaper owner William Hayward. When one examines the specific types of occupation included in the artistic professions one finds that, of the five Pen and Palette club members in this group, two were architects and two were sculptors. At the Bewick Club one was an architectural draftsman, and two more were in skilled art crafts.

The same differences between the two clubs are evident if one looks at the membership of the groups' committees from 1884 to 1895.³⁹ At the Bewick Club, the average number of domestic servants for the 58 for whom figures are known, was 1.3 and 20 members had no servants at all. However, there were some members with considerably higher numbers of servants, such as Charles William Mitchell, who had 18. At the Pen and Palette, from the 21 for who figures are known, the average was 2.9. Four of these members did not have servants, but there were two members with ten or more and two with between five and ten.⁴⁰

³⁹ Committee lists are cited in copies of the Bewick Club's exhibition catalogues. Catalogues for the period do not survive passed 1895. The Bewick Club's committee membership was heavily composed of artists, as stated by the constitution, so it is less useful than the 1884 general membership list in conveying a picture of the club's occupational profile.

⁴⁰ All figures calculated from www.1901censusonline.com, accessed 24 November 2005.

5.3: Residential Patterns: Taken from the Census Year Nearest to a Member's Joining Date⁴¹

	Bewick Club (% of total in brackets)	Pen and Palette Club (% of total in brackets) ⁴²
Central Newcastle	8 (13)	3 (10)
County Durham Excluding Gateshead	5 (7)	1 (3)
Gateshead	12 (19)	3 (10)
Heaton and Byker	3 (5)	0 (0)
Jesmond	10 (16)	5 (17)
Newcastle, but ward not specified	1 (2)	1 (3)
Northumberland	8 (13)	3 (10)
Shields, Tynemouth, Whitley Bay and Cullercoats	6 (7)	5 (17)
Westgate and Elswick	8 (13)	6 (21)
Other	1 (2)	1 (3)
Total	62	28

In terms of residency the case for economic difference between and within groups is strengthened. Both groups shared memberships which were drawn from socially and economically diverse areas of Northumberland and Durham. Both groups had committee members who lived in the affluent areas of Coxlodge and Gosforth as well as some members who lived in the working-class areas of Byker and Elswick. For example, at the Bewick Club the membership ranged from Robert Jobling who, in 1881, lived at 85 Corbridge Street in the working-class district of Byker, with five children and one domestic servant, to Charles Mitchell, who lived in Jesmond Towers with 11 servants.⁴³

⁴¹ All figures calculated from: www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/census and www.1901censusonline.com, accessed 25 November 2005.

⁴² All percentage figures are rounded up to the nearest whole number.

⁴³ All figures calculated from: www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/census and www.1901censusonline.com, accessed 27 November 2005.

As a general rule however, those involved in the Bewick Club, tended towards middle- and working-class areas in Newcastle. 10 lived in Jesmond, an area then fashionable with the middle class, although not the very wealthy. Similarly, Johnson Hedley lived in the lower middle-class area of Heaton and Robert Jobling and Walter Lowery, in the working-class district of Byker. Despite a similarity in the percentages of members from both groups living in the Jesmond, Central Newcastle and Northumberland areas, the Pen and Palette Club's residency figures reveal a slightly different picture to those of the Bewick Club. 21% of the membership, whose residences are known, lived in the city's older middle-class areas of Westgate or further out towards Elswick, a working-class area, but with a number of larger residencies, in which many of these members lived. Similarly, the Pen and Palette had a significantly larger percentage of members living in the coastal regions than did the Bewick Club.

The differences between the economic and social profiles of the two clubs is not due to the time difference between the establishment of both groups as the overall socio-economic mix in the Newcastle area changed little between the 1880s and 1900s. The percentage of working-age men in classes one and two stayed stable at roughly 16%, whereas the figures for those in class three remained at around 50%.⁴⁴ The differences between the clubs highlight that the determining factor in the membership profile of Newcastle's artistic clubs *was not class*. These art clubs do not 'reveal a conscious effort to set up mechanisms to provide class cohesion for the bourgeoisie'.⁴⁵ Their memberships were varied, both across clubs and inside of them.

This is further highlighted by the fact that neither the Bewick Club nor the Pen and Palette Club fitted easily into the wider associational life of Newcastle which was dominated by the city's very large Literary and Philosophical Society. Robert Spence Watson, the president of that society and a notable educational reformer, was a member of the Bewick Club and addressed the club on occasion. However, neither the Bewick nor the Pen and Palette Club were under the patronage of the society, as were most of the other

⁴⁴ Great Britain Historical GIS project 2004, *A Vision of Britain through Time*. (Portsmouth, 2004), at www.visionofbritain.org.uk, viewed 3 November 2005.

⁴⁵ Caroline Arscott, 'Without Distinction of Party': The Polytechnic Exhibitions in Leeds 1839-45' in Janet Wolff and John Seed (eds.), *The Culture of Capital: Art, Power and the Nineteenth-Century Middle Class* (Manchester 1988), p. 155.

clubs and societies in Newcastle in the period. Watson noted in his history of the Literary and Philosophical Society that 34 institutions had been given free access to the society's rooms between 1886 and 1896, including the Photographic Society and the Northern Architectural Association. Indeed, Watson's history of the society, which makes reference to a number of different institutions and associations, does not make mention of the Bewick Club at all. Similarly, R.J. Charleton's celebrated history of Newcastle asserted the prominent role of Sir William Armstrong in the support of local associations, including the Literary and Philosophical Society and yet the second Lord Armstrong played a very limited role in the life of the Bewick Club. An Honorary president post was only created at the end of the nineteenth century and then Lord Armstrong, who was the first, was no more than a figurehead.

Few council members of the Pen and Palette and the Bewick Club were also members of the Literary and Philosophical Society, even as ordinary members. Only five Pen and Palette Club and 10 Bewick Club members joined between 1880 and 1905. By contrast 12 members of the short-lived Arts Association became members of the society, despite the fact that the association had only 30 committee members during its life time, the Bewick Club had 83 and the Pen and Palette had 34.⁴⁶

Members of the Bewick and Pen and Palette clubs do not seem to have joined other associations. For example, The Newcastle Literary Club, which began in 1888, had only one member of the Bewick Club, Robert Routledge, on its membership list. Joseph Crawhall, an ex-member of the Arts Association was also a member.⁴⁷ The very large Tyneside Parliamentary Debating Society had only two members from the Pen and Palette, George Dodds, Liberal M.P. for Bradford and C.W. Newlands, a solicitor. There were three members from the Bewick Club, the Liberal Adam Carse, who was a councillor and the Conservative Corbet Gourlay, an advertising contractor and Robert Redpath, a journalist.⁴⁸ Similarly no members of the

⁴⁶ Membership of the Literary and Philosophical Society taken from: *Literary and Philosophical Society, Members, 1868-1888* (Newcastle, 1890) and *Literary and Philosophical Society, Roll of Members 1900-1905*, LPS, O1900-1905.

⁴⁷ Newcastle Literary Club, Correspondence Scrapbook, 1888-1890, NCL, L374.23

⁴⁸ Information taken from Tyneside Parliamentary Debating Society, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, *List of Members, Constitution and Rules, Session 1891-1892* (Newcastle, n.d.); Tyneside Parliamentary Debating Society, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, *List of Members, with their Politics and Constituencies* (Newcastle, 1881).

Pen and Palette and only three members of the Bewick Club were also members of the North-East Coast Club, whose object was to 'study of natural history of the sea and the seaside'.⁴⁹

The Bewick and the Pen and Palette clubs were small associations with economically and socially diverse memberships, which did not fit into the larger middle-class associational life of the area. They were not therefore part of any larger conscious or unconscious middle-class front involved in a re-negotiation of power in the late-Victorian and Edwardian city. Similarly, the membership was not drawn, as Peter Bailey may suggest, primarily by the 'middle-class' status of the group, as members tended not to become involved in many other non-artistic associations. H.E. Meller notes of Bristol that 'thirty two of the fifty members of the Clifton Antiquary Club were also members of the [city's] Literary and Philosophical Society. Membership of the main cultural societies was thus obviously a matter of privilege and social status'.⁵⁰ The same uncomplicated conclusion can not therefore be reached for Northumberland. The artists saw their occupation as important to their identity, which explained their detachment from other associations. Similarly, the class status of the membership was too varied to mean, as Williams suggests, that the character of the associations were moulded by the fact of its membership's economic homogeneity.

Local Identity

The strength of identification with 'the local' and the use of local art traditions, social conditions and scenery in the work of many of the artists suggests that occupational club affiliation was allied not only to class but to local ties. This identification with the local was also seen in the clubs' membership policies, mission statements, exhibitions and links to other clubs. Indeed, identification with 'the local' seems to have been an independent source of cultural capital and a source of shared identity.

The Articles of Association for the Bewick Club stated that members of the art council, from whom the honorary secretary and treasurer were elected, were required to be resident 'within a distance of twenty miles from Newcastle upon Tyne'.⁵¹ Similarly, all of those who were proposed as members of the Bewick

⁴⁹ Northumberland Coast Club, *Reports 1900-1902* (n.d.), n.p.

⁵⁰ H.E. Meller, *Leisure and the Changing City, 1870-1914* (London, 1976), p. 63.

⁵¹ Bewick Club, *Bewick Club Articles of Association*, p. 23.

Club were subject to a ballot, thus enhancing the possibility that artists elected to the art council were known, professionally or personally, to other members of council. Similarly, over 80% of Pen and Palette Club members were drawn from the Northumberland region and further 13% from the neighbouring area of Gateshead.⁵²

Furthermore, less formal groupings, such as the Cullercoats Colony, had many more members who were born or settled in the county than comparable groups such as that at Newlyn. Of the 17 artists who stayed at Newlyn for five years or more, only one, Harold Charles Harvey (1874-1941), was born in Cornwall. Benjamin Arthur Batemen (1831-1923) was born in London, Frank Richards (1863-1935), Walter Langley (1852-1922) and Edwin Harris (1855-1906) were born in Birmingham. Four were born outside England, Norman Garstin (1847-1926) and Stanhope Forbes (1857-1947) in Ireland, Elizabeth Forbes (1859-1912) was born in Canada and Frank Wright Bourdillon (1851-1924) in India. In Cullercoats the majority of associated artists were born in Northumberland. Of the 30 members of the group, whose birthplaces can be found, fifteen were born in Northumberland, four in Durham. There were two artists born in Yorkshire, and of these, Ralph Hedley's family moved to Newcastle before he was three. Similarly Bernard Hemy's family was originally from Newcastle and moved back to Northumberland from Australia, where Hemy was born.⁵³

The address made by Robert Spence Watson to the club in 1885 highlighted the organization's close ideological association with the county. Firstly, Spence Watson highlighted that the club was a place to foster Northumbrian art. Secondly, he emphasized how the prestige of the club would add to the prestige of the area. He ended his speech by saying 'I look forward to it being the centre of our best art teaching; because I hope for good things to spring from it for our dear North Country'.⁵⁴ Spence Watson clearly envisaged the club as belonging to the county and not to a specific class section within it.

⁵² See 5.3.

⁵³ These figures are based on the 'group membership' lists in Laura Newton (ed.), *Painting at the Edge: British Coastal Art Colonies 188-1930* (Bristol, 2005), p.p. 159-67 and the members' entries in www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/census, accessed 2 January 2006.

⁵⁴ Robert Spence Watson, *An Address to the Members of the Bewick Club, Delivered by Robert Spence Watson, LL.D., F.R.G.S., 4th November, 1885* (Newcastle, 1885), p. 16.

Watson made the link between the work of the club and the work of Thomas Bewick and put them both in the context of what he envisaged were local characteristics. ‘When we speak of Northumbrian art’ he noted, ‘we think of Thomas Bewick ... his engravings are like our old Northumbrian ballads, simple, direct, true and full of meaning’. Spence Watson saw the link between artist and place as important because he clearly believed that to truly appreciate an artist’s work, one had to be acquainted with his geographical origins: ‘if you wish to know how Correggio could paint, you must go to Parma; if to become acquainted with Francia to Bologna’ and so on. Indeed, much of his speech was clearly intended to be pitched at ‘insiders’ to the county’s culture, who could, according to Spence Watson’s logic, truly appreciate its art. For example, after rooting Bewick’s qualities in the county he stated of Bewick’s work that: ‘[he was not] the transcendent genius, whom you admire afar off ... but the cherished friend of daily life whom you welcome at all times to your own fireside’. He was therefore, to Spence Watson, a comfortable insider to Northumbrian culture who gained his cultural capital from this ‘authenticity’.⁵⁵

Spence Watson also noted that: ‘here in Northumberland [there is] ... art which deserves to be fostered ... the *raison d’être* of the Bewick Club is its fostering’ in order that ‘Northumberland maintain, and, if it may so be, better the position in art which she already holds’. He believed that the art that was being encouraged would ‘[make] our young children ... refined, softened [and] humanized’ in a county where ‘the love of art is not ours as a people’. Spence Watson then attempted to sum up why Northumbrians should love art, because it would allow them to see the beauty of their own land as a source of pride. As he noted: ‘the nearer things are to us, the less we look at them’.⁵⁶ He heaped praise on the Northumbrian countryside saying, for example, ‘no lovelier river valleys than the North Tyne, the Wansbeck and the Coquet can be found within travelled Europe’ and ‘in what country part of Europe will you find so many varied and august ruins?’⁵⁷ He extended this praise to the people of the county, asking: ‘what land teems with poetry, legend and romance, like our boarder lands?’⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Ibid., p.p. 6-14.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p.p. 6-14.

⁵⁷ Both quotes, *ibid.*, p. 14.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p.14.

Quinn notes that writers such as Aaron Watson were attempting to incorporate the industrial landscape of Northumberland with its artistic heritage. As he notes ‘art would allow the region to claim a special aesthetic all of its own: the enjoyment and appreciation of industrial sites’.⁵⁹ Spence Watson also attempted this in his address. ‘We imagine that the poetry has gone out of life in our modern days! Go to our Central Railway Station ... tell me what is more poetical in the history of man’.⁶⁰ Spence Watson therefore saw that work of the Bewick Club was to promote the appreciation of art and artistic talents within the county, so that its qualities, both rural and modern, would be better appreciated.

Spence Watson pleaded for a corporation gallery in Newcastle. In order to point out what could be done in this direction he used the example of other English cities, especially Manchester. However, this is not evidence of a *civic* pride, which has been linked by historians such as Giles Waterford and Dianne Macleod to the middle-class’ attempt to gain cultural capital through rivalry with other cities.⁶¹ Spence Watson’s comments regarding these other cities seemed to be aimed at persuading the corporation that such a scheme would be practical. He mentioned, in some detail for example, Manchester’s committee and its financial arrangements. Although he briefly mentioned four other corporations which gave assistance to exhibitions he did not dwell on their success, nor did he seek to make comparisons between these cities and Newcastle. When assessing the beneficial impact of a permanent gallery in Newcastle he drew on the experience of Italian, not British, cities. It does not seem therefore that Spence Watson was either trying to shame the corporation, by stirring feelings of rivalry towards other British cities, nor was he emphasizing the cultural value it would help add to Britain. His plea seems entirely insular and furthermore it was directed to the county, not the city.

Similarly, the exhibitions of the Bewick Club showed a strong attachment to the work of the local artist and the depictions of local scenery. If one compares the number of local scenes exhibited at the Arts Association exhibition in 1882 with the Bewick Club exhibition of 1885, the contrast is striking. In 1882 39

⁵⁹ Quinn, ‘“Their Strongest Pine”’, p. 124.

⁶⁰ Watson, *An Address to the Members of the Bewick Club*, p. 15.

⁶¹ See Giles Waterford ‘Galleries and the Public: A Survey of Three Centuries’ in Martineau, Jane [et al.], *Art Treasures of England: the Regional Collections* (London, 1998), p. 34; Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class*, p. 38.

paintings were of Northumberland landmarks compared to 115 depicting other places in England. At the 1885 exhibition there were 93 local scenes and 130 scenes of England.⁶² Both exhibitions were similar in size. The Bewick Club's 1890 exhibition had 100 more paintings than that of 1885, however, scenes of England outside of Northumberland grew in number by only nine, scenes of Scotland and Wales grew by five each and scenes of the wider world fell by five. However, scenes of Northumberland grew by 29.⁶³ It is clear then that not only was the club interested in displaying depictions of the county, this was also the genre it was most interested in developing.

The same trend towards the local can be seen in the residency patterns of the exhibiting artists. The Arts Association had tended to favour London artists at their exhibitions and indeed, there were 136 London artists, as opposed to 27 Northumbrian artists displayed at the 1879 exhibition.⁶⁴ The Bewick Club, however, favoured Northumbrian artists. At the 1885 exhibition there were 81 London-based artists and 162 Northumberland-based artists exhibiting. Those figures stayed relatively stable in 1890, when 154 artists were based in Northumberland and 79 were based in London. The trend continued and developed in 1895 when there were 43 London artists and 162 Northumbrian artists.⁶⁵ The reliance on Northumbrian artists seems to have been part of a deliberate policy, given the local focus of the club. Indeed, every member of the art council, who were all artists, had to send at least one painting to each Bewick Club exhibition.

Despite the reluctance of members of the Bewick and Pen and Palette clubs to join non-artistic organizations, one non-artistic club which boasted a significant Bewick Club and Pen and Palette Club membership was the tiny Northumbrian Small Pipes Society; founded by Richard Oliver Heslop (n.d.) of the Pen and Palette. The club had eight Pen and Palette and Bewick Club members in 1896 alone. The society was interested in the small pipes as much for their status as traditional Northumbrian instruments as for their musical quality. The motto of the society was 'still linger in our Northern clime, some remnants of

⁶² Figures calculated from: Arts Association, *Annual Exhibition 1882* and Bewick Club, *Fine Art Catalogue 1885* (Newcastle, 1885).

⁶³ Bewick Club, *Fine Art Catalogue 1890* (Newcastle, 1890).

⁶⁴ Arts Association, *Annual Exhibition 1879*.

⁶⁵ All figures calculated from: Bewick Club, *Fine Art Catalogue 1885*, Bewick Club, *Fine Art Catalogue 1890*, Bewick Club, *Fine Art Catalogue 1895* (Newcastle, 1895).

the good old time' and Heslop's achievements with the club were summed up as: '[feeding] the bantling on Northumberland words, [nurturing] it with Northumberland music'.⁶⁶

The memberships of these clubs were shaped by occupation and interest, but this was not a symptom of the middle-class status of their members. These clubs were more interested in the geographical status of the membership than their social status, restricting, for example, the Bewick Club to artists from the local area. Furthermore, men like Spence Watson clearly envisaged the art of Northumberland as being particularly important in the forming of a local identity and appreciation and he saw the role of art clubs as central to this project. This was obviously in keeping with the attitudes of the Bewick Club who filled their exhibitions with the work of local artists and more importantly with paintings which depicted local scenes. The cultural capital to be gained from membership to these clubs came from their county, and not class, status. It is telling that one of the only clubs to be heavily attended by members of the Bewick and Pen and Palette Club members was the tiny Northumbrian Pipes Society, with its interest in a distinctive county practice.

Interest in Northumberland History and Tradition

There was clearly an interest in Northumberland's history during the 1880s and 1890s. The character and timing of such interest is open to interpretation, however, several strands emerge clearly. Firstly, there is evidence of such interest in local history in many other counties in the period. Secondly, the interest in Northumbrian culture was not unique to the 1880s and 1890s and its roots earlier in the century. Thirdly, as a 'movement' it was mostly insular and not overly interested in presenting an image to the outside world. Fourthly, this image did include elements of the industrial but, especially when looking beyond artistic culture, this inclusion was very limited.

Quinn suggests that such interest was not new, stating, for example, that many of Spence Watson's speeches on the subject were 'an end of century amalgam of those discourses that the local enthusiasts of the mid-century had established'.⁶⁷ Laura Newton agrees with Quinn, noting that 'throughout the nineteenth century local newspapers, music hall, books, songs and poetry celebrated the region's dialects,

⁶⁶ Northumbrian Small Pipes Society, *Annual Meeting, 1896* (North Shields, 1896), p. 14.

⁶⁷ Quinn, ' "Their Strongest Pine" ', p. 128.

often to recount tales of history and myth'.⁶⁸ However, this assertion is qualified by Quinn who notes that '[there was an] upsurge in interest in the identity of the region ... during the 1880s'.⁶⁹

For Newton the interests of the mid and the late century were similar in tone and were both aimed at a local audience, but there was a shift away from celebrating the industrial nature of Northumberland towards the end of the century. Her analysis of the reasons for such interest is however inconsistent when directed towards cultural productions, including pictorial art. On one hand she sees that written and painted depictions of places like Cullercoats were 'an attempt to create an alternative "northern" image to counteract the industrial stereotype [and part of] ... a local drive to promote the north east in the national league of regions'.⁷⁰ On the other hand she suggests that artistic producers, such as the Cullercoats artists, 'subsumed the need for national recognition' and produced works to 'accommodate the local domestic market'.⁷¹

Given the importance of local exhibition venues, market and audiences, it would seem very much as if Newton's second assertion was the most valid and that local artists at least were not too interested in promoting their work to a national or international audience, or indeed making their works entirely understandable to a non-local audience. Indeed, as Quinn notes, Samuel Pearson's biographical sketch of Emmerson praised local artists because '*our* artist-seers ... have shown *us* the North-country character in those features which mark it off from other districts'.⁷² For Pearson therefore, the exercise in local identity was an inwardly-focused project. Indeed, Quinn characterizes the perception of the local artist as being only truly local when he was 'withdrawn from the centre of society' and only truly fulfilling his role as an "'artist-seer" when he was among his people'. Therefore, it would seem that the interest in Northumberland history and traditions was an insular exercise rather than an attempt to promote the county to those outside of its boundaries.

⁶⁸ Laura Newton, *Cullercoats: A North-East Colony of Artists* (Bristol, 2003), p. 35.

⁶⁹ Quinn, ' "Their Strongest Pine" ', p. 121.

⁷⁰ Newton, *Cullercoats*, p. 35.

⁷¹ *Idem*.

⁷² Samuel Pearson, 'H.H. Emmerson: A Biographical Sketch in *Catalogue of Emmerson Exhibition held at The Galleries, 62 Grainger Street, December 1895* (Newcastle, 1895), p. 25. Italics added.

Furthermore, Newton's conclusion that the works of local colony artists 'lost much of their relevance as regionalism gave way to a new British urban identity focused firmly on London', seems erroneous.⁷³

Firstly, it is predicated on the notion of a homogenized middle class who did not gain their identity or cultural capital from the county or locality, as seems likely and which she herself suggests. Secondly, local interest in Northumbrian history and traditions was insular in audience and character and developed despite any cultural homogenization which could be seen as having taken place amongst the middle class.

Quinn disagrees with Newton in her assertion that depictions of the industrial were marginalized for rural displays which 're-packaged' the county in the late century. Indeed, for Quinn, depictions of the industrial were essential to notions of local identity. Quinn acknowledges that 'the north east was identified with industry' but for him, the reaction to this was to assert, as did Aaron Watson, that industrial areas were 'not something to be ashamed of nor was it a matter to be hidden'.⁷⁴ Indeed, the industrial was celebrated and commented upon in the work of Hedley and the urban landscape featured in the work of Horton.

Furthermore, Pearson appreciated the value of the industrial in artistic terms, noting, 'they [artists] have looked upon our present life with the seer's eyes-the busy throbbing life of Tyneside, rushing and eddying like its river, with its comedy, tragedy and pathos'.⁷⁵ For Quinn, the inclusion of the industrial gave local artists a unique task, to 'allow the region to claim a special aesthetic all of its own' because the artist was 'ahead of the public perception' and in a privileged position, both because he was local and because he was an artist.⁷⁶ However, the inclusion of industry in the perceived identity of the county was limited in some non-artistic forums. For example, the Literary and Philosophical Society's lecture series on Northumbrian history paid scant attention to the area's industrial heritage. The series consisted of a lecture by Richard Heslop on local dialect, Thomas Hodgkin on the Romans in Northumberland, Richard Welford, a renowned local historian, on Newcastle in the seventeenth century and Spence Watson on artistic, musical and

⁷³ Idem.

⁷⁴ Quinn, ' "Their Strongest Pine" ', p. 124.

⁷⁵ Pearson, 'H.H. Emmerson', p. 25

⁷⁶ Idem.

tellingly, folk culture.⁷⁷ Therefore, the importance of the industrial in conceptions of county identity should not be overemphasized in relation to non-artistic culture.

Interest in Northumberland history and self-image formed the backdrop to the work of the Bewick and Pen and Palette Clubs. Furthermore, the earlier, mid-century growth of such an identity coincided with the increasing self-confidence of the local artist. Indeed, Northumbrian artists' concentration on the local market accords with the general trend towards an insular pitching of Northumbrian cultural issues. However, the willingness of artists to engage with the industrial, in a way that the important Literary and Philosophical Society would not, suggests that the conception of a 'local identity' was not fixed.

Conclusion

Artistic groups in Northumberland constituted professional and amateur interest groups aimed at advancing artists' careers and providing artists and amateurs with recreational facilities. Although many of the members could have been said to have been middle class in the widest sense, their occupations, residences and domestic servant numbers reveal a very mixed group. Indeed, in economic terms they had little binding them together. These groups were small, self-selecting and exclusive groups, whose exclusivity rested on artistic and not social status. Furthermore, many members' only contribution to associational life was through these art clubs and in the main they shunned the larger societies, the likes of which have often been placed at the forefront of middle-class associational identity, such as Newcastle's Literary and Philosophical Society.

However, the Bewick Club's status as professional interest group does not mean that one can easily see the membership as belonging to an homogenized middle class by virtue of their interest in professional associations. The Bewick Club, especially, was self-consciously localist in focus and any cultural capital that members gained came from the club's county and not class associations. For example, the Bewick Club exhibitions favoured scenes of Northumberland painted by artists born or based in Northumberland. Indeed, it named itself after Thomas Bewick, already the most famous Northumbrian artist of the

⁷⁷ Newcastle-upon-Tyne Literary and Philosophical Society, *Lectures on Northumbrian History* (Newcastle, 1898), contents page.

nineteenth century. The club listened to speeches by the likes of Robert Spence Watson who argued for an increase in the appreciation of Northumberland and advocated the artist as a key figure in this project. Emmerson's biography, attached to the 1895 exhibition, talked of him in terms of being a local artist, a seer amongst his people. Furthermore, when members of the artistic groups did join other associations in proportionally large numbers they often chose those societies that encapsulated an idea of Northumbrian culture.

Artists' interest in Northumbrian identity did not occur in a vacuum. Many in Northumberland's literary and academic circles were interested in these issues at the same time and although interest grew to a peak in the 1880s and 1890s, it had begun, for artists and others alike, in the mid century, displaying itself in artistic terms, in part of the hostility towards the London-centred Arts Association. However, there was no consensus as to the specific attributes of Northumbrian identity, or at least such an identity was not fixed. Therefore, for example, the acknowledgement of industrial heritage varied between the artistic community and the academic community. Furthermore, celebration of the county was insular, both in message and in practice.

Artistic identity was bound up with an idea of 'Northumberland' for a number of reasons. As stated in the previous chapter the demands of the local market and the dictates of Naturalism and Realism were evidently important factors. The use of the name Bewick, famed for his natural, almost 'primitive', attachment to the land is also important, although as Quinn notes it is problematic. Bewick's 'primitive' appeal was based on his attachment to and depictions of Northumberland, his 'folksy' style of engraving and his dislike for the metropolis. In this sense, his reputation for natural genius was predicated on the image of Northumberland as a cultural backwater. Whilst doubtlessly not subscribing to the latter view, founding members of the Bewick Club were perhaps drawn to Bewick's association with the natural, which accorded to their own style. Furthermore, by appropriating the imagery of Northumberland, partly in retaliation to the London-centric displays of the Arts Association, they were giving themselves a status as insiders, artist-seers and true Northumbrians.

The artist, according to men such as Aaron Watson and Samuel Pearson had a special role in the shaping of such a county identity because the artist was seen as the artist-seer, showing the Northumbrian community itself and teaching it to love its native area. Such a role showed how far the artist had come from the 1830s in the recognition of his profession and the value of his work to the wider community. He was now not only an arbiter of public taste, but an arbiter of public identity, for many in Northumberland's art market.

Tellingly, this identity was a county identity, which was indicative both of the times and of the earlier training of many of the prominent late-century artists, however, the status was not to last.

Chapter Six

The Early Laing Art Gallery, from its Conception, c.1880-1914. ¹

The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate that the founding and early management of Newcastle's Laing Art Gallery shows no evidence of having been based upon either middle class and corporation civic pride or a desire to produce a middle-class cultural statement. Rather, the early history of the gallery is an elite history and this elite behaved much as the Arts Association had in assuming the role of public patron and arbiter of public taste, excluding the influence of local artists from the gallery's management. This raises questions of many conventional historiographical arguments, including the supposed decline of elite influence, decline in provincial culture in the early twentieth century, the role of the public gallery in civic pride and authority and the division between the elite's 'high' art and the popular art of the masses. Underpinning this chapter is the idea that changes in class identity did not lead to the decline of the localist agenda in arts but that this decline is best seen as a return to an older status quo in Northumberland based on the idea that the artistic elites were best placed to be the public arbiters of artistic taste.

According to the historiography, Victorian art galleries as well as other public buildings, such as the libraries and town halls built in northern industrial centres, were established by the local elites as a source of civic pride and 'boosterism'. ² As such the links between this group, urban place and the municipal council, which was most often at the forefront of such activities, is seen as the key framework in which to place the creation of public buildings, although who exactly constitutes this elite is contentious. R.J. Morris notes there was a 'commitment amongst many middle-class activists to "civilisation" ... the parks, libraries and galleries ... were a very visible outcome of the municipal state', 'as the power of the urban identity gathered pace'. ³ Richard Trainor's position is similar although his interpretation of the elite's link with the urban place is more nuanced. He makes a small but crucial distinction between the upper-middle class who

¹ These dates were chosen because, although the Laing Art Gallery did not open until 1904, the first debates on the building of a municipal gallery began in the 1880s.

² Jon Stobart, 'Building and Urban Identity. Cultural Space and Civic Boosterism in a "New" Industrial Town: Burslem, 1761-1911', *Social History* 29 (2004).

³ R.J. Morris 'Structure Culture and Society in British Towns' in Martin Daunton (ed.), *Cambridge Urban History of Britain: Volume III 1840-1950* (Cambridge, 2000), p.p. 412-4.

‘frequently promoted “high culture” in their town or city’ but had more substantial links to other urban and rural centres and the ‘middle-middle-class ... [who] were more focused ... on their locality’. ⁴

Indeed, some historians go further than Morris and assert that the middle class used such institutions as agents of social control over the working class. For example, Shelagh Wilson and Michael Harrison use the examples of the Whitechapel Gallery and the Manchester Art Museum as evidence of this and Caroline Arscott argues that middle-class consciousness was strengthened by the Leeds Polytechnic Exhibitions. ⁵ Similarly, Jon Stobart’s analysis of the smaller Midland’s town of Burslem comes to the conclusion that ‘in these [manufacturing] places ... civic culture—the construction of town halls, museums, libraries, concert halls and the like—was central to identity and image, both of the town and its elite’. ⁶ Similarly, H.E. Meller’s study of Bristol notes that ‘the dominant cultural institutions of the city owed everything to ... the ruling classes ... civic pride, municipal ostentation and competition with other cities were ... important elements [in their development]’. ⁷ However, Meller does temper the association of the elite with the imperatives of civic pride by noting the importance of the ‘Liberal culture ideology’ to the elite’s civic building. ⁸

John Garrard offers an interesting conclusion as to why the link between place, middle-class civic building and the local corporation should have existed so strongly in the Victorian urban environment. For Garrard, in rural areas ‘[middle-class and municipal] power could be exercised through largely informal channels while in the urban arena it required ... [a] more organized, more institutionalized, more governmental, and

⁴ Richard Trainor, ‘The Middle Class’ in Martin Daunton (ed.), *Cambridge Urban History of Britain: Volume III 1840-1950* (Cambridge, 2000), p.p. 694-5.

⁵ Shelagh Wilson, ‘“The Highest Art for the Lowest People”: the Whitechapel and other Philanthropic Art Galleries, 1877-1901’ in Paul Barlow, and Colin Trodd (eds.), *Governing Cultures: The Art Institution in Victorian London* (Aldershot, 2000). Michael Harrison, ‘Art and Philanthropy: T.C. Horsfall and The Manchester Art Museum’ in Alan Kidd and K.W. Roberts (eds.), *City, Class and Culture: Studies of Social Policy and Cultural Production in Victorian Manchester* (Manchester, 1985) and Caroline Arscott, ‘Without Distinction of Party’: The Polytechnic Exhibitions in Leeds 1839-45’ in Janet Wolff and John Seed (eds.), *The Culture of Capital: Art, Power and the Nineteenth-Century Middle Class* (Manchester 1988).

⁶ Stobart, ‘Building and Urban Identity’, p. 485.

⁷ H.E. Meller, *Leisure and the Changing City, 1870-1914* (London, 1976), p. 70.

⁸ Idem.

thus [an] ultimately more rule-bound approach'.⁹ This model has been criticized by historians who feel that it does not take into account the issue of gender, which, for Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall for example, is essential to understanding middle-class identity in the Victorian period.¹⁰ Consequently, middle-class civic identity has been increasingly seen as a gendered as well as class-based identity.¹¹

Importantly for a study of the Laing Art Gallery is the fact that much of the literature on civic pride and municipal building is focused on the mid- to late- Victorian period and not on the Edwardian era. Of course this is due to Newcastle being very late in the building of a municipal gallery compared to other British cities. This timing difference is especially important as many historians have discerned a change in urban society in this period, in particular that there had been a lessening of the link between the middle class and place. This debate has its origins in the 1980s when W.D. Rubinstein and Martin Weiner built on the work of historians and theorists such as Tom Nairn and Perry Anderson in their assertion of a 'post-1846 construction of landed hegemony' and middle-class 'failure' to construct a clear ideology.¹² Rubinstein and Weiner saw the period immediately prior to 1918 as the period of the decline of landed society and the formation of a single, homogenized, middle class, no longer as segregated by place and occupation, between 1918-1925.¹³ According to this argument the close links between landed society and the southern, financial middle class, led to their ascendancy and the marginalization of the northern industrial middle class who consequently loosened their links with their northern localities and ceased to be interested in issues of civic pride.¹⁴

Historians differ as to the time scales of such an 'exodus' of middle-class elites from northern urban residences and, more significantly for this study, from urban philanthropy and civic building. However,

⁹ John Garrard, 'Urban Élites, 1850-1914: The Rule and Decline of a New Squirearchy?', *Albion* 27 (1995), p.p. 594-5.

¹⁰ See Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (Chicago, 1987).

¹¹ Alan Kidd and David Nicholls have attempted to integrate gender and class identity in Alan Kidd and David Nicholls (eds.), *Gender, Civic Culture and Consumerism: Middle-Class Identity in Britain 1800-1940* (Manchester, 1999).

¹² Wolff and Seed, *The Culture of Capital*, p. 19.

¹³ See W.D. Rubinstein, 'Wealth, Élites and the Class Structure of Modern Britain', *Past and Present* 76 (1977).

¹⁴ See Rubinstein, 'Wealth, Élites and the Class Structure', W.D. Rubinstein, *Capitalism, Culture and Decline in Britain 1750-1990* (1993); Martin Weiner, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit, 1850-1980* (Cambridge, 1981).

there is now a consensus that 'decline' was limited or non-existent until somewhere between the 1900s and 1940. John Garrard notes that the decline thesis is open to exaggeration in the period up to 1914 but, nevertheless, he sees that 'decline in a local leadership combining social, economic and political substance was significant ... before 1914' and that also meant that there was both less of a cross-over between municipal and economic and social power and that there was a decline in public philanthropy from the urban elites, especially in northern towns. However, it is not within Garrard's remit to question why this may have the case.¹⁵ In contrast, Richard Trainor argues that 'for the period before 1914 the case for 'decline' in urban governance is made, either in terms of the social substance of urban élites or of their political and policy effectiveness'.¹⁶ Indeed, Trainor goes as far as to suggest that 'perceptions of decline in the 1920s and 1930s have been exaggerated'.¹⁷

Most historians broadly agree that there was a decline in the link between the elite, urban place and local government and that the watershed for this was around the time of the First World War. R.J. Morris notes that 'between 1850 and 1920, the membership of urban, economic, social, political and cultural elites was overlapping, closely integrated and identified with place'¹⁸ but by the 1920s and 1930s 'urban politics became identified with the working class' and 'urban places were changing their social identity' and becoming more working class in outlook.¹⁹ Indeed, he mentions Newcastle as an important example of this.

Stobart believes that for Burslem the high-water mark of municipal social power and civic pride came with the building of a new town hall in 1911, even in the midst of local government reorganization, which would see Burslem incorporated into the new larger county borough of Stoke-on-Trent. It was this political amalgam that, for Stobart, led to the decline of traditional urban governance. The study serves as a small-scale example of the effects of political nationalization- as towns lost their political power, so they lost

¹⁵ Garrard, 'Urban Élites', p. 608.

¹⁶ Robert J. Morris and Richard H. Trainor (eds.), *Urban Governance: Britain and Beyond since 1750* (Aldershot, 2000), p. 36.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.p. 36-7.

¹⁸ R.J. Morris 'Structure, Culture and Society', p. 415.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.p. 418-9.

some of their identity. As Stobart notes, the new town hall was intended as 'one final marker of Burslem's identity and pride'.²⁰

Simon Gunn similarly notes that although there was no exodus of business elite families in places such as Tyneside, Norwich and Leicester, nevertheless, 'the identity between elements of the middle class and the particular urban place ... began to fragment in the first half of the twentieth [century]'.²¹ This was replaced by a stronger working-class link with the city space and with a middle class that was 'defined more and more by features that were ... national in scope'.²² It is worth noting that in all of these studies there is an explicit difference made between the notion of an upper-middle class exodus to the country and a middle-middle class exodus to suburbia, and the decline of place identity for the middle class.

These studies have their limitations when describing Victorian civic pride in the 1880s and 1890s. Firstly, by ascribing civic pride as a mere signifier of middle-class identity the historiography does not allow for smaller interest groups, such as artists, with an interest in local identity which was more than a simple reflection of their economic status. Secondly, the paradigm subsumes those antiquary societies and artist groups, which flourished in the late nineteenth century, even though such societies were as interested in the history of those rural spaces which could not be 'claimed' by any one city. Thirdly, the model stresses that civic pride was often more to do with impressing another city's elite than forging a distinctive identity and therefore there was an appropriation of cultural capital from the centre through the aping of classical and gothic styles. Stobart echoes this when he notes: 'through civic culture, elite groups signalled their power and worth to elite groups in other towns as much as (perhaps more than) to the ordinary people in their own area'.²³ As such the historiography downplays the importance of celebrations of difference between cities and also displays of national Scottish or Welsh identities. There is no reason to think that artists, at least, would necessarily change either their focus or that there would remain, at least a reduced, audience interest in the distinctness of a city, locality or county. The cultural situation in the 1880s and 1890s in northern

²⁰ Stobart, 'Building and Urban Identity', p. 497.

²¹ Simon Gunn, 'Class, Identity and the Urban: the Middle Class in England, c.1790-1950', *Urban History* 31 (2004) p. 41.

²² Ibid., p. 44.

²³ Stobart, 'Building and Urban Identity', p. 487.

towns cannot be reduced to the display of middle-class pride through civic display. Therefore, even if there were an elite and middle-class 'exodus' from the cities this did not necessarily mean that localist sentiment died. Because, for example, small interest groups had their own, non-class based agenda in the depiction of the county and local pride was not always focused on the cities.

Newton points out that at the beginning of the twentieth century Northumbrian art 'lost much of [its] relevance as regionalism gave way to a new British urban identity focused firmly on London'.²⁴ However the evidence she offers for this is unsatisfactory. Firstly, she asserts that local artists 'broaden[ed] [their] horizons in terms of sketching grounds and exhibition venues', however, the appendix she dedicates to this point shows no indication of such a shift.²⁵ Secondly, many of Northumberland's painters had painted urban scenes in the 1880s and 1890s and local art could not be sidelined by the local art market for being too rural in focus. Thirdly, Newton notes that sidelining occurred for all British colonies, yet, as she concedes, the colony in Northumberland sold to a local audience, whereas the work of colonies such as those at Newlyn, Staithes, or the School at Glasgow, sold best in London. For a London audience perhaps the relevance of such colonies declined, but for a Northumbrian audience the work of the Cullercoats group was merely a part of local artistic output that depicted city, coast and countryside.

A wholesale rejection of county or local identity in favour of a 'British' identity focused on London would mean that those involved would have been influenced primarily by their class identity in the area of art. However, as was demonstrated in chapters four and five, this class identity did not always negate other identities, even when they had opposite imperatives. Therefore, artists in the 1870s argued with other members of the broadly defined middle class over exhibition space for local artists. Here, class identity was not the primary motivator and there is no reason to believe that this should have shifted by the early twentieth century.

²⁴ Laura Newton, *Cullercoats: A North-East Colony of Artists* (Bristol, 2003) and Nina Lübbren "'Toilers of the Sea', Fisherfolk and the Geographies of Tourism in England, 1880-1900' in David Peters Corbett, Ysanne Holt and Fiona Russell (eds.), *The Geographies of Englishness: Landscape and the National Past 1880-1940* (New Haven, 2002), p. 36.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

The only two historians who have attempted to explain the late arrival of the Laing Art Gallery have fitted it into a framework of elite identification of urban place. For Atkins there had been ‘social homogeneity’ and ‘a tacitly accepted capitalism’²⁶ in Newcastle across most of the nineteenth century, which was based on radical liberalism and a ‘relatively classless, alternative local culture’.²⁷ For Atkins it was only when homogeneity broke down through a stronger working-class identity, in the Edwardian period, that the elite felt the need to build a civic gallery as a ‘seigniorial statement’.²⁸ Newton is correct when she asserts that the council were uninterested in making such a statement as they waited until ‘the means ... were handed to them on a plate’ in the form of a large donation to build the gallery from Alexander Laing.²⁹ However, this rather undermines Newton’s own claim that ‘civic pride ... should ... have made it easier for the council to justify the expense as an extension of Novocastrian identity’.³⁰ Indeed, it seems that, as Atkins suggests, the building and running of the gallery was an elite affair, as shown by the social composition of the gallery’s committee of management, and that, as Newton suggests, there was little enthusiasm for civic culture ‘boosterism’, or a class statement, from a predominantly middle-class council which had prevaricated on the building of the gallery for many years.

The first section of this chapter will advance the idea that in Newcastle until 1901, there was no substantial link between the middle class, the corporation and the idea of civic pride evident in the issue of a municipal gallery. It will suggest that there was however a strong and continuing relationship between the arts and the city’s financial elite. This relationship was as important to the founding and management of the Laing as it had to the Arts Association and the strength and power of this relationship therefore showed little sign of decline between the 1870s and the 1900s.

²⁶ E.M. Atkins, ‘The Genesis of the Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle upon Tyne’, in T.E. Faulkner, (ed.) *Northumbrian Panorama: Studies in the History and Culture of North East England* (London, 1996), p. 199.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 203.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

²⁹ Laura Newton, ‘The Cullercoats Artists’ Colony c.1870-1914’, unpubl. PhD thesis, University of Northumbria, 2001, p. 84.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

The second section will focus on the exhibition priorities of the Laing and will stress the importance, to the committee and the curator, of displays of British works, which they believed to be of national importance. In doing so they behaved much as the Arts Association had behaved in the 1870s and 1880s.

The third section will examine the Laing's Exhibitions of Works by Artists of the Northern Counties series, which ran from 1905. It will demonstrate that the elite were uninterested in fostering a county or even local identity and ran the exhibitions as small-scale commercial and populist ventures, whilst considering them of little aesthetic value, in an attitude that complimented the focus on metropolitan-centric art.

The fourth section will explore the sidelining of artists at the Laing Art Gallery and the reduction in their role as arbiters of public taste. It will also seek to explain why there was no artistic agitation against this, as there had been to the sidelining of Northumbrian art at the Arts Association exhibitions.

The Creation of the Laing

There had been calls for a municipal gallery for many years before the Laing gallery's opening in 1904. As Newton notes the subject was raised in the advance notice to the 1866 Mechanics' Institute Exhibition, at both the speech made by Sir Ridley and in the mayor's letter, read at the opening of the 1885 Bewick Club³¹ and in the Earl of Carlisle's speech at the opening of H.H. Emmerson's posthumous exhibition in 1895.³² Furthermore, it was mentioned in the speech by Newcastle's mayor John Goolden at the opening of the Bewick Club's 1896 exhibition, in which he publicly hoped that the 'council would grapple with the matter.'³³ Furthermore, there had been sporadic fighting in the council chamber over the matter, for example in 1885, following a deputation from the Bewick Club, a Special Fine Arts' Committee was established and recommended that £50 be made to the Bewick Club on an annual basis, on the recommendation that for one week of each exhibition the 'general public [were] admitted at the charge of

³¹ W H Stevenson's letter is reported in full in the *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 24 January 1885.

³² *Ibid.*, p. p. 79-80.

³³ *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 24 December 1896.

one penny', a motion that was narrowly defeated.³⁴ There had also been a scheme to build an art gallery in Elswick Park in 1899 for which £50 was granted by the council, but this scheme also died.³⁵

Finally, in 1899 the council announced their intention to build a gallery by subscription and a committee of notables, including Earl Grey and Lord Armstrong, was charged with the task of soliciting funding.³⁶ In four months they managed to raise only £1,200, but the following February Alexander Laing, a local businessman, who was originally from Scotland, offered the council £20,000 for a gallery to be built in his name, amidst 'loud cheers and shouts of "hurrah"' from the council.³⁷ Management was given to the Laing Art Gallery Committee and the gallery finally opened on 14 October 1904 and the date was termed a 'notable anniversary in the local annals'.³⁸

City, Council and the Middle Class in Newcastle

The history of the Laing's establishment shows little evidence of the relationship between urban place, municipality and the middle class that is thought to be central to the impetus, funding and management of Victorian and Edwardian public buildings. Firstly, the council were uninterested in the idea of a gallery that would have to be funded from the local rates and was immune to pleas of civic pride, either before or after the opening up of the council to more sections of the middle class. Secondly, the middle class was slow to fund the building of the gallery and was inactive in campaigning for a gallery before it was proposed. Furthermore, the gallery was not designed as a statement of middle-class dominance. Thirdly, it was an elite group of very successful businessmen and the members of the artistic elite, including Lords, Viscounts and others, who both funded and managed the gallery. This group's primary focus was on non-local and avant-garde art. Some were patrons of the arts before 1904 and the committee as a whole sought to become patrons of a public art that would edify and instruct the whole community, regardless of class. In this, they acted exactly as had the Arts Association in the 1870s.

³⁴ Newcastle Council, *Council Reports 1885-1886* (Newcastle, 1886), p. 162.

³⁵ Newcastle Council, *Council Reports 1898-1899* (Newcastle, 1899), p. 423.

³⁶ An account of the general meeting can be found in the *Newcastle Daily Leader*, 13 October 1899.

³⁷ Newcastle Council, *Council Reports 1900-1901* (Newcastle, 1901), p. 153.

³⁸ *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 14 October 1904.

Newcastle council had never shown a great interest in the building of a public gallery. In 1880 there was a move within the council to add three rooms, for a gallery, to the plans for a public library, but these were dropped in order to make room for a reference section.³⁹ The idea of municipal sponsorship to the Bewick Club, in order that it performed a public function, had been met with much resistance in 1885. Although Millard asserts that the proposal was rejected because T.P. Barkas, the owner of Newcastle's commercial gallery, abstained,⁴⁰ there were in fact 25 councillors against, and only 13 for the motion.⁴¹ The arguments for and against the public funding of the Bewick Club were varied and displayed no coherent outlook. Henry Morton, who represented St Nicholas' ward, commented that the money would be better spent on the relief of the poor not 'a thing which wealthy people had to do with'.⁴² William Sutton, who represented the Jesmond ward, argued along slightly more esoteric lines when he stated that: 'these exhibitions stand on their own merit. Where the corporation had to do with these things it would tend to bring the exhibition down to the level of mediocrity'.⁴³ Adam Carse justified the support by arguing that there were 'many poor artists ... in Newcastle', whereas alderman Cail noted public enthusiasm for art, stating that many of Newcastle's better-off citizens 'had to see the Royal Academy exhibitions' every year.⁴⁴ Indeed, the matter of civic pride never came into discussions, despite the fact that the Bewick Club deputation had made it the central part of their plea, saying: 'the city ought to put itself in a position which would, at least, bear comparison to other towns, especially in the midlands'.⁴⁵

By 1901, the city council had opened up membership to a broader cross section of the community. For example, in 1883 many of the councillors had been merchants, ship and colliery owners and provisions dealers of large establishments, by contrast the council of 1901 included managers, agents, small shop owners, accountants and solicitors, although among the aldermen there were some who were substantially wealthy. Newton argues that this was likely to mean that 'those newer councillors were even less likely to support a municipal gallery since the less well-off rate payers (like themselves) could ill afford the resultant

³⁹ John Millard, *A Romance with the North East: Robert and Isa Jobling* (Newcastle, 1992), p25.

⁴⁰ Millard, *A Romance with the North East*, p. 32.

⁴¹ Newcastle Council, *Council Reports 1885-1886* (Newcastle, 1886), p. 162.

⁴² Newcastle Council, *Council Reports 1885-1886* (Newcastle, 1886), p. 161.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

rates increase'.⁴⁶ Atkins seems to disagree, as she notes that it was at precisely this junction that the gallery was created. In reality, however, the changing social composition of the council seemed to have little effect either way and their apathy remained relatively unchanged. George Harkus, the mayor in 1899, initiated the discussions that were to lead to the Laing Art Gallery. The initial suggestion was, however, very modest, he asked for £600 to be loaned to the Local Government Board to prepare two rooms in Elswick Hall for a gallery.⁴⁷ Indeed, the hall was the residence of Alderman Sir William Stephenson, who already housed some council sculptures. Although moves had been made therefore, there was clearly a feeling that the process be as cheap as possible. Although John Goolden, the mayor in 1895, had pointed out that 'the only difficulty ... was to the rates' in this matter, the council had recently seriously considered the building of a new Town Hall to be paid for in that way.⁴⁸ It seems then that the council felt that a gallery was not an appropriate or acceptable use of public money, especially as the subsequent scheme for a separate gallery was to be paid for by subscription.

There was little middle-class agitation for a corporation art gallery. This was quite possibly because, until 1895, there was the Central Exchange Gallery in the city as well as the regular Arts Association and Bewick Club exhibitions. Certainly there was very little in the local press to suggest that there was any *active* support. In 1899 a 700-signature petition called for a public meeting on the issue of a gallery. However, the petition does not survive and so it is impossible to tell from whom the signatures came.⁴⁹ Interestingly, Newton's reading of the public meeting is that it was 'a highly-orchestrated affair', by whom she does not answer, but it seems likely that she means the council.⁵⁰ Given this, the spontaneity of the petition may be called into question.

At the end of the meeting, presided over by the mayor and assisted by four members of the council, it had not only been decided that the gallery should be funded by public subscription and not by the rates, but also

⁴⁶ Newton, 'The Cullercoats Artists', p. 79.

⁴⁷ Newcastle Council, *Council Reports 1899-1900* (Newcastle, 1900), 11 October 1899.

⁴⁸ *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 24 December 1896.

⁴⁹ The *Newcastle Daily Leader*, which contained a large section on the public meeting has been withdrawn from public viewing by Newcastle Central Library. Any information on the meeting can now, primarily, only be found in the secondary accounts of Newton and Atkins.

⁵⁰ Newton, 'The Cullercoats Artists', p. 83.

£1,000 had been pledged in that direction. There is no way of knowing who pledged money, but at the meeting the fundraising committee had been formed and it is likely that they would have been required to pledge first. The fundraising committee was not middle class in composition, but comprised of some of the area's most wealthy elites, including the M.P. Joseph Cowen, Lord Armstrong, Lord Grey and the Earl of Ravensworth, Sir Isaac Lowthian Bell, Sir Joicey and Sir Browne. Furthermore, the other named attendees were mainly artists attached to the Bewick Club, the only group who had consistently agitated for a municipal gallery, since the 1880s. Despite the fact that Sir William Stephenson 'did not think they need hesitate about being able to raise [the subscription] ... in a city like Newcastle'.⁵¹ When the subscription list left the meeting, only an extra £200 had been raised in the proceeding three months.⁵²

It was Northumberland's business and financial elite who were instrumental in the building and early management of the gallery. Alexander Laing offered the council £20,000 to 'present to the city a building to be known as the "Laing Gallery"', providing that it be built on the Higham Place site on which it now stands.⁵³ Furthermore, it had been the elite that comprised the fundraising committee. Those who were initially deeply involved, via the committee, were strikingly similar in social status to the Arts Association committee, some twenty years before. Indeed, the Earl of Ravensworth had been a patron for the Arts Association, although it is not clear whether this was the second or third earl, as had the third Earl Grey-the fourth earl sitting on the fundraising committee. Similarly, Issac Lowthian Bell and Joseph Cowen had been on the committee of management and Lord Armstrong had been Arts Association president.

Furthermore, although Newcastle council was becoming more socially heterogeneous, the first Laing Art Gallery Committee, which partially comprised of the more wealthy councillors, was heavily skewed in favour of the richer elements of Northumberland society. The vice chairman, under Alexander Laing, was Alderman Henry William Newton, a consistent supporter of a corporation gallery. He was also a relatively wealthy doctor with three servants in 1901. More impressively however were viscount Ridley and the new Lord Armstrong, as well as Robert Spence Watson, who left £35,850 on his death in 1911. Furthermore,

⁵¹ *Newcastle Daily Leader*, 13 October 1899, quoted in Newton, 'The Cullercoats Artists', p. 83.

⁵² *Idem*.

⁵³ Newcastle Council, *Council Reports 1900-1901*, 9 January 1901.

J.D. Milburn was a ship owner and J. Wigham Richardson was a shipbuilder who left £95,001 in 1908. Also on the committee was Thomas Hodgkin, a banker, Johnstone Wallace, an iron and coal importer, Charles Binks, an insurance broker, whose brother-in-law was secretary to the Trade Protection Society and J. Cooke, a timber broker. The social composition of the committee changed little in the years up to 1914. By this time the committee four new members had been added, Sir Walter Plummer, William Bruce Reid, a factory manager and Percy Corder, a solicitor.⁵⁴

However, elite involvement had little to do with a wish to make the gallery a 'seigniorial statement by a local elite, conscious of both the approach of socialism and of a working class increasingly capable of self management and less amenable to control'.⁵⁵ This elite, indeed many individual members of it, had been involved in arts patronage, collecting and the Arts Association, over many years. Lord Armstrong, for example, was a notable patron of a number of artists, including the local artists Henry Hetherington Emmerson and Thomas Bowman Garvie and many others involved in the management and fundraising committees owned works by local and non-local artists. The Earl of Ravensworth owned paintings by Turner and Rembrandt amongst others.⁵⁶ There was, therefore, little new in the elite influence to be found at the Laing.

Laing Gallery Exhibitions

The Laing Art Gallery committee acted similarly to the Arts Association committee by favouring the work of non-local artists. The first curator was Arthur C.B. Stevenson who was hired from the curatorial staff of Nottingham Art Gallery and who remained in post for 53 years. Stevenson claimed that he was 'in touch with the highest living authorities upon art matters and can obtain [contacts] ... free of expense to the corporation'.⁵⁷ Stevenson made annual trips to London in order to keep in touch with 'curators, artists, art

⁵⁴ All information on occupation from www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/census, accessed on 10 May 2007 and all information on wealth Lawrence Goldman (ed.), *Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2007), at www.oxforddnb.com accessed 10 May 2007.

⁵⁵ Atkins, 'The Genesis of the Laing', p. 202

⁵⁶ Newton, 'The Cullercoats Artists', Appendix 1 n.p.

⁵⁷ Laing Art Gallery, Committee Minute Book, Volume One, 15 December 1904.

workers, and owners of valuable treasures of art and all art movements of importance'.⁵⁸ In appointing Stevenson, the committee turned down applications from two older, local artists. One was from James Watson, a 52 year-old member of the Bcwick Club and the art master of Royal Grammar School and the other was Thomas Dickinson, 49, who cited 'experience of organizing exhibitions of art in Newcastle for a period of over 20 years' as his chief qualification.⁵⁹

In December 1904, Stevenson set out his aims for the gallery, which were very close to those obligations promoted by various societies in the 1830s and the Arts Association in the 1870s. He wished the gallery to make 'the aims and the higher principles of art more generally understood' which he hoped would lead to a 'cultivation of taste in the rising generation'.⁶⁰ Furthermore, he believed that the inaugural loan exhibition of art was praiseworthy because it was 'one of national interest' and as such able to 'maintain the dignity of the gallery'.⁶¹ Indeed, it included two sections illustrating the history of British art from Hogarth to Leighton, in oils and watercolours, a section of foreign masters and a museum collection, as well as section of local art. Loans were appropriated from the Victoria and Albert Museum and the British Museum and galleries in Birmingham, Nottingham and Liverpool, as well as from Wedgwood and Son.

The inaugural exhibition set the tone for many of the exhibitions to come, which focused on the work of non-local artists, whom the curator thought were nationally, or internationally, important. In 1905 and 1906 there were exhibitions of the British School, including works from the Victoria and Albert Museum, by artists such as Clausen, John Everett Millais, Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882) and Turner and also, in 1905, an exhibition of works by British artists more generally, many of which were taken from William Stott's collection at Oldham.⁶² There was also an exhibition of Scottish artists in 1908-1909. Similarly, there were several one-man shows by leading British artists, including George Frederick Watts (1817-1904) in 1905, Tom Browne (n.d.) in 1910, Thomas Cooper Gotch (1854-1931) in 1910, Sir Alfred East

⁵⁸ Laing Art Gallery and Museum, Committee Minute Book, Volume Two, TWAS. ND/NC 129/2, 30 April 1909.

⁵⁹ Laing Art Gallery, Committee Minute Book, Volume One, 19 May 1904.

⁶⁰ Laing Art Gallery, Committee Minute Book, Volume One, 1 Dec 1904.

⁶¹ *Idem*.

⁶² Laing Art Gallery and Museum, *Exhibitions 1904-1973* (n.d.), n.p.

(1849-1913) in 1914 and Turner in 1912, as well as an exhibition by members of the London Sketch Club in 1907.⁶³

The curator was often most enthusiastic when he suggested international and ‘important’ national exhibitions. His first report on future exhibitions stressed both cost effectiveness, by emphasizing loan exhibitions and an international agenda, suggesting exhibitions by ‘the Dutch, Flemish, French, Scottish and Spanish schools’ as well as ‘historical’ and ‘religious subjects’, ‘portraits of national celebrities’ and ‘works by Royal Academy presidents’.⁶⁴ In his report from London in 1906 he saw ‘the collection of pictures by Flemish and modern Belgium painters at the Guildhall’ and thought it ‘very important’. He ‘strongly recommend[ed] the formation of such a collection’ at the Laing.⁶⁵ Similarly, Stevenson praised the Special Exhibition of Contemporary British Art in 1907 because ‘the fact that so high a quality is being maintained ... renders it [an exhibition] of national importance’.⁶⁶ Similarly, in 1913 the curator suggested a special exhibition ‘illustrative of important events in British history ... [because] for the intellectual and artistic education of the people it would be impossible to overestimate its usefulness’.⁶⁷

The gallery did show some interest in local art, but this was both limited and of a different character to that shown by the Bewick Club in the 1880s and 1890s. There were only two loan exhibitions dedicated to local artists. There was an exhibition of works by the Richardson family in 1906 and an exhibition of James Peel (1811-1906) in 1907. There was also an exhibition of paintings and objects relating to old Newcastle in 1915. The Laing had therefore not decided to concentrate on living artists and James Peel, although born in Newcastle, had spent most of career elsewhere and was chiefly notable for his regular exhibits at the Royal Academy and the his work in organizing free exhibitions in London. There were no shows of contemporary local artists before the First World War. This is unsurprising as it was never a priority of the curator to promote a local ‘school’. Stevenson did propose an exhibition by ‘deceased artists of the Newcastle

⁶³ *Idem*.

⁶⁴ Laing Art Gallery, Committee Minute Book, Volume One, 1 Dec 1904.

⁶⁵ Laing Art Gallery, Committee Minute Book, Volume One, 22 June 1906.

⁶⁶ Laing Art Gallery, Committee Minute Book, Volume One, 26 May 1907.

⁶⁷ Laing Art Gallery and Museum, Committee Minute Book, Volume Three, TWAS. ND/NC 129/3, 25 June 1913.

School' in 1906,⁶⁸ including works by Emmerson, Way, Parker and Bewick, because 'owing to want of space' this had hitherto be impossible. However, the scheme was never acted upon in this period.⁶⁹

The Exhibitions of Works by Artists of the Northern Counties

Despite the committee's limited interest in the exhibition of local artists in loan exhibitions, from 1905 the gallery held a series of Exhibitions by Artists of the Northern Counties, which ran annually throughout the period, except in 1907. These exhibitions were, however, very different from those organized by the Bewick Club. Firstly, the exhibitions were illustrative of a much broader definition of 'the north', than the focus on Northumberland shown by the Bewick Club. Secondly, they seem to have been interesting to the committee because they were both easy to organize and profitable. Indeed, there was little curatorial interest shown in them from an aesthetic point of view.

Whereas the Bewick Club had fostered a sense of Northumberland identity, the annual Laing exhibitions concentrated on the 'northern counties', which, for their purposes, comprised of Northumberland, Durham, Cumbria, North Yorkshire and both sides of the Scottish borders. Occasionally, the exhibitions would show works by artists connected to the counties, but resident elsewhere. The amount of paintings from artists resident in each of the counties remained fairly stable over the period, between 1909 and 1913 there was an average of around 20 paintings from Northumberland, 15 from Durham, nine from Yorkshire, three from Cumbria, 20 from Gateshead, 10 from Sunderland, 25 from Tyneside and 60 from Newcastle.⁷⁰ There was a preponderance of works by artists based in Newcastle at all major Tyneside exhibitions and so in this the Laing was not unique. Indeed, the high proportion probably reflected the population size of the city, the fact that many artists had studios there and the relative ease and cheapness of transporting pictures to the Laing by artists based in the city. Excluding the Newcastle artists however, one can see that, with the exceptions of Yorkshire and Cumbria, most of the areas fared more or less equally. There was no dominance of Northumberland art over that of the rest of the counties, as was seen at the Bewick Club exhibitions. Indeed, the whole of County Durham, including Gateshead and Sunderland, sent an average of

⁶⁸ Laing Art Gallery, Committee Minute Book, Volume One, 22 February 1906.

⁶⁹ *Idem*.

⁷⁰ See Laing Art Gallery and Museum, *Catalogues of Exhibitions of Works by Artists of the Northern Counties, Volume 1, 1905-1922* (n.d).

45 pictures, as did Northumberland and Tyneside, without Newcastle. The Laing committee therefore did not wish to foster a Northumberland identity at the exhibitions, or to enhance the careers and profits of a small group of Northumberland artists in the way that the Bewick Club had operated. This is unsurprising as the gallery never intended to act as an interest group to local artists and by using a broad definition of the north they both demonstrated a non-insular outlook and increased the number of artists who were eligible to send works.

Furthermore, the Laing exhibitions seem to have been formed with the primary object of increasing revenue for the gallery. Most years the Northern Counties exhibition was the only sale exhibition to be held and so it had an important financial role. As such, the character of the exhibition changed over time and exhibits became both more affordable and more commercial. For example, in 1909 jewellery and handicrafts were added to the sale catalogues. Large numbers of jewellery remained part of the exhibition for the period. Whereas the largest section in 1909 was that of watercolours, of which there were 293 examples, there were 49 pieces of jewellery.⁷¹ The figures were similar in 1910, when there were 267 watercolours and 42 pieces of jewellery and by now woodcarvings had been added for sale. In 1913, when there were 419 oils and watercolours combined, there were only 18 pieces of jewellery, but added to this were 28 book illustrations and 11 etchings.

Similarly, the numbers of expensive pieces of sculpture declined. In 1913 there were only six and in 1914 small pieces of plaster sculpture were being sold for 11 shillings.⁷² By contrast, in 1909 there were 10 sculptures and in 1908 there were 15 pieces of sculpture, including a bust of the secretary of the Northumberland Miners' Union, priced at £25 and a bust of a peasant priced at £10.⁷³ Similarly, at the first exhibition in 1905, there were marble and bronze sculptures of figures from antiquity, on display for between £20 and £30.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Laing Art Gallery, Committee Minute Book, Volume Two, 30 April 1909.

⁷² Laing Art Gallery and Museum, 'Catalogue of the Ninth Annual Exhibition of Works by Artists of the Northern Counties' in Laing, *Catalogues ... Volume 1*, p. 35.

⁷³ Laing Art Gallery and Museum, 'Catalogue of the Exhibition of Works by Artists of the Northern Counties, 1908' in Laing, *Catalogues ... Volume 1* p. 56.

⁷⁴ Laing Art Gallery and Museum, 'Catalogue of the Exhibition of Works by Artists of the Northern Counties, 1905' in Laing, *Catalogues ... Volume 1*, p. 39.

The average price of oil paintings also declined during the period. In 1905, oil painting prices ranged from between £3 and £250. There were 124 such paintings on show and 22 were priced at, or over, £50, whereas only nine were priced at, or below, £5.⁷⁵ By contrast, in 1914, of 104 oil paintings, which ranged in price between £2 and £262, there were 16 priced at, or over, £50 and 17 priced at, or under, £5. Indeed, the most expensive painting, *The Echo of the Mountains* by John Charlton (n.d.), was an exception at the exhibition, where most of the paintings priced over £50 were, unlike at the 1905 exhibition, priced under £100.⁷⁶ Similarly, in the 1905 exhibition, there were 159 watercolours, priced between £1 1s for Marion Gill's (n.d.) *Head of Ulleswater* (n.d.) and Mrs C Hopkins (n.d.) *In Godshill, Isle of White* (n.d.) and £200 for Robert Spence's (n.d.) *Borcovicus* (n.d.). There were 27 priced at, or over, £15.⁷⁷ At the 1914 exhibition there were 258 watercolours, priced between 6s and £100 for *Northumberland Coast, Hartley Looking towards Blyth* (n.d.) by George Horton and *Counting the Catch* (n.d.) by C.N. Hemy (1841-1917). There were only 12 priced at, or over, £15.⁷⁸

The Northern Counties exhibitions also showed a number of amateur female artists who sold very modestly priced paintings and handicrafts, which were very well represented at the exhibitions. For example, in 1905 24% of the exhibitors were female,⁷⁹ in 1909 20% were female⁸⁰ and in 1913 this figure had risen to 33%.⁸¹ Similarly, female artists often showed many exhibits. In 1905 the average number was 2.7,⁸² in 1908 it was 3.4,⁸³ in 1909 it was 3.2⁸⁴ and in 1914 it was 2.9.⁸⁵ Some regular exhibitors, such as Isabella Thompson were professional artists, however, although it is impossible to be definitive, it seems that most were amateurs. For example, at the 1914 exhibition most of the female artists exhibited either cheaply priced watercolours or examples of handicrafts and jewellery.⁸⁶ Indeed, the screens in Gallery B were

⁷⁵ Laing Art, 'Catalogue ... 1905'.

⁷⁶ Laing, 'Catalogue of the Ninth Annual Exhibition'.

⁷⁷ Laing Art, 'Catalogue ... 1905'.

⁷⁸ Laing, 'Catalogue of the Ninth Annual Exhibition'.

⁷⁹ Laing Art, 'Catalogue ... 1905'.

⁸⁰ Laing Art, 'Catalogue ... 1909'.

⁸¹ Laing, 'Catalogue of the Eighth Annual Exhibition' in Laing, *Catalogues Volume 1*.

⁸² Laing Art, 'Catalogue ... 1905'.

⁸³ Laing Art, 'Catalogue ... 1908'.

⁸⁴ Laing Art, 'Catalogue ... 1909'.

⁸⁵ Laing, 'Catalogue of the Ninth Annual Exhibition'.

⁸⁶ Idem.

almost entirely taken up with pictures of flowers painted by female artists and priced between £3 and £5.⁸⁷ Similarly, the most prolific female artist exhibiting at the 1905 exhibition was Mary Watson, she exhibited nine works, all of which were pencil sketches of children and animals selling for under £3.⁸⁸ Of course there were paintings by notable artists such as Isabella Thompson, Laura Knight (1877-1970) and Alice Van Heddeghem (n.d.), whose oil paintings could command £36,⁸⁹ however, on the whole the majority of the works displayed by female artists were likely to have been by amateurs, who mostly exhibited undemanding watercolours and sketches of children and flowers and handicrafts. The large presence of such work was further evidence therefore, that the Northern Counties exhibitions were intended to be commercial and not displays of high art or Northumbrian identity.

There is evidence that the exhibitions were a steady source of income for the gallery. Firstly, the exhibitions drew large crowds. In 1906 there were around 30,000 visitors,⁹⁰ in 1909 there were 50,793⁹¹ and in 1912 45,604 visitors.⁹² Secondly, money could be made from commissions on paintings. For example, 24 paintings worth £185 18s were sold in 1906, making the gallery £7 11 6 in commission.⁹³ In 1910 11 pictures were sold for £67 12s,⁹⁴ in 1913 17 paintings were sold for £92 17s⁹⁵ and in 1912 the gallery sold £119 5s worth of artwork. Thirdly, the gallery made money on the sale of catalogues. In 1909 £19 13 3 was collected on the sale of catalogues⁹⁶ and in 1911 £12 13 3 was made,⁹⁷ however, there are no profit figures for these, unlike for 1912 when there was a profit made of 15s.⁹⁸ Fourthly, the Art Union, which ran in 1913, but had to be closed for legal reasons, was profitable, with £96 12 6 worth of tickets sold and an £80 prize, although the committee minute book does not give a figure for 'the expense of printing', the committee still drew a commission on the prizes.⁹⁹

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. p. 34-5.

⁸⁸ Laing Art, 'Catalogue ... 1905', p. 5.

⁸⁹ Laing Art, 'Catalogue ... 1909', p. 40.

⁹⁰ Laing Art Gallery, Committee Minute Book, Volume One, 25 Jan 1907.

⁹¹ Laing Art Gallery, Committee Minute Book, Volume Two, 30 July 1909.

⁹² Laing Art Gallery, Committee Minute Book, Volume Three, 26 Sept 1912.

⁹³ Laing Art Gallery, Committee Minute Book, Volume One, 25 Jan 1907.

⁹⁴ Laing Art Gallery, Committee Minute Book, Volume Two, 27 Jan 1911.

⁹⁵ Laing Art Gallery, Committee Minute Book, Volume Three, 26 Sept 1913.

⁹⁶ Laing Art Gallery, Committee Minute Book, Volume One, 25 Jan 1907.

⁹⁷ Laing Art Gallery, Committee Minute Book, Volume Two, 24 Nov 1911.

⁹⁸ Laing Art Gallery, Committee Minute Book, Volume Three, 26 Sept 1912.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 26 Nov 1916.

The curator at least never seemed to have any enthusiasm or high opinion of the Northern Counties exhibitions, or indeed, of local art more generally. His report on the exhibition remained relatively unchanged in tone throughout the period. He concluded of the 1911 exhibition that: 'it [was] thoroughly representative of local art'.¹⁰⁰ In 1908 he told the committee that that year's exhibition had been 'one of the most popular held at the gallery'.¹⁰¹ Similarly, of the 1912 exhibition he merely stated that: 'it has been the most successful since its inauguration ... [because] over 42,000 have inspected the collections'.¹⁰² Despite the type of commercial art that had been given prominence at the exhibitions, the curator congratulated himself and the committee in 1913 by saying: 'it is extremely gratifying to note the great progress made in local art since the inauguration of the exhibition'.¹⁰³

The Artists of the Northern Counties Exhibitions were very different from the Bewick Club exhibitions of the 1880s and 1890s. They were not intended to foster a sense of Northumberland identity and artists were drawn from a wide geographical area, probably to maximize numbers of submissions and visitor numbers. Indeed, commercial concerns seem to have been very much at the forefront of the curator's and the committee's policy for these exhibitions. Whereas the educational importance of other loan and special exhibitions was stressed in the committee minute book, there was no such interest in the Northern Counties exhibitions, where the curator gave prominence to issues of visitor numbers and profits, whilst making bland, repetitive statements regarding the quality of the exhibits. Indeed, this preoccupation can be seen in the types of exhibit the curator favoured, including many watercolours and his strategy seems to have been a move towards displays of handicrafts and jewellery as well exhibiting many amateur female artists who typically sold cheaply priced drawings and watercolours of undemanding subjects.

The Involvement of Local Artists

This period saw a decline in the vitality of the Northumberland art scene, as the role of artists as arbiters of public taste declined. This was not least due to the fact that most of those artists active in the 1880s and 1890s died before the First World War. Although Newton argues that this decline was due to the decreasing

¹⁰⁰ Laing Art Gallery, Committee Minute Book, Volume Two, 29 September 1911.

¹⁰¹ Laing Art Gallery, Committee Minute Book, Volume One, 29 May 1908.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p271.

¹⁰³ Laing Art Gallery, Committee Minute Book, Volume Three, 25 April 1913.

importance of the local art world in favour of that of the metropolis, this explanation is unsatisfactory. The Laing Art Gallery itself seems to have been at least partly responsible for the decline in the artists' public role. Firstly, local artists were sidelined from the management of the gallery and secondly, the Laing did not wish to work with other artists' groups. In doing so the gallery was acting in a similar manner to the Arts Association, in that it concentrated the decision-making power to itself. However, because of the Northern Counties exhibitions, there was no obvious focus for artists' frustrations. In addition to this the originality of the local Naturalist works of the 1880s and 1890s were not replaced by anything new and so the art works themselves lost much of their vitality. This however, was largely due to an entirely coincidental run of misfortune for the local art community.

Artists were not involved in the running of the Laing Gallery or in the Northern Counties Exhibition. As Atkins notes, there were no artists on the fundraising committee, although Newton is probably correct in her assessment that this was because such committees were best served by wealthy and influential members. Also, however, there were no artists on the Laing Art Gallery Committee although the rationale for non-council appointments is unknown, it would seem again that Newcastle Council felt that such a committee would best be served by those with wealth and influence. Furthermore, two local artist candidates for the curator's position were turned down in favour of a member of the Nottingham Art Gallery staff, partially because he was familiar with London art 'authorities'.¹⁰⁴

The Bewick Club also had limited success in changing the practices of the Laing in relation to the Northern Counties exhibitions. In 1907 there was a suggestion that there be a joint Bewick Club and Northern Counties exhibition, however, this scheme was dropped at a subsequent meeting between Stevenson and Hedley, representing the Bewick Club. The Bewick Club's main concern was that the Northern Counties exhibitions change their dates so they did not clash with those of the club, which could not be altered from November. Stevenson agreed to this and it was also agreed that the Bewick Club, or at least Hedley, 'co-operate with this committee in forming a representative collection' for the exhibition, and that Bewick Club

¹⁰⁴ Laing Art Gallery, Committee Minute Book, Volume One, 4 July 1904.

members be starred in the catalogue.¹⁰⁵ Indeed, the 1908 exhibition was moved to February, the 1909 exhibition to April and the Bewick Club members were highlighted in the exhibitors' lists in 1908. However, starring members' names was not repeated in any subsequent years and from 1910 the exhibition dates were moved again and in 1910 the exhibition ran from September to January, it ran in September and November in 1911, August to October in 1912, June to October in 1913 and July to September in 1914, immediately preceding that of the Bewick Club. Similarly, several other local art societies were turned down in their requests to hold exhibitions in the gallery. For example, the North British Academy of Arts, established in 1898 and based in the Claremont Buildings near to the gallery, had their request turned down, with no explanation, in April 1910.¹⁰⁶ Similarly, the Art Circle had such a request denied in June 1906.¹⁰⁷

The executive power was concentrated in the hands of the Laing's committee and curator and the public role of the artist as arbiter was sidelined. Indeed, any co-operation, in the decision-making processes of the gallery with local artists was slight and short lived. Similarly, by denying the exhibition of certain art groups' work, on the reasonable grounds that such work could be seen at the Northern Counties exhibitions, the gallery substituted artist-led exhibitions for commercial-led displays.

However, there was no artist-led agitation in the press against the actions of the Laing. Any explanations for this are necessarily tentative but there are two obvious possibilities. Firstly, artists' first concern may have been financial and the gallery did offer exhibition space to local artists to sell their work and so agitation would have been imprudent and undesirable. Secondly, and most pertinently however, was the fact that many of the most successful local artists and important members of the Bewick Club died or moved away during this period. Arthur Hardwick Marsh died in 1909, Henry Hetherington Emmerson in 1895, Ralph Hedley in 1913 and George Horton moved away from the area in around 1900. Much of the

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 26 April 1907.

¹⁰⁶ Laing Art Gallery, Committee Minute Book, Volume Two, 29 April 1910.

¹⁰⁷ Laing Art Gallery, Committee Minute Book, Volume One, 22 June 1906.

leadership of the local art scene was lost therefore and with it perhaps the sense of local artistic identity that was forged by the generation of artists taught at the Newcastle School of Art.

Conclusion

Newton's explanation for the decline in the local art scene before the First World War is based on two linked ideas, prominent in much of the wider historiography. The cultural focus of the middle class moved from the local cities to the metropolis as the elites moved away from the towns in which they had created their wealth, for the countryside. This meant that there was a decline in civic pride and an assertion of the metropolis in the consciousness of the middle-class artists, market and exhibition-going public. Much of the recent historiography has re-positioned this shift and focused the main developments in the inter-war period, however, even these revisionist historians agree that some shifts were occurring before 1914. However, this argument is predicated on the idea that class identity was the primary form of cultural identity. Also, it conflates a decrease in civic pride with a decrease in a wider local identity.

A study of this art world shows that the supposed links between the middle class, the municipality and place, which the historiography posits was changing before the war, may not have been as strong in some places as has been asserted. Early appeals by artists for the council to create a municipal gallery, or to help organizations such as the Bewick Club, were ignored, despite the fact that the idea of civic pride was used as a persuasive device on many occasions. Indeed, this attitude was not confined to the support of local art initiatives, as is seen by the council's ambivalent attitude to the People's Concerts series which was partially and controversially subsidized by the council until the First World War.¹⁰⁸ Similarly, the middle-middle class was uninterested in actively supporting a municipal gallery, perhaps from apathy, perhaps for fear of rate increases. Indeed, they failed to give generously to subscription schemes as well.

In Northumberland in this period at least, it is continuity and not change that asserts itself most forcefully and this is the key to explaining the emergence and character of the Laing Art Gallery. There were some changes in the constitution of Newcastle Council, but even with these, it was the same financial and business elite who were most heavily involved in the Arts Association as were involved in the Laing Art

¹⁰⁸ See Joseph W. Pegg, *Newcastle's Musical Heritage: An Introduction* (n.d), at www.newcastle.gov.uk/www/fileroot/educationlibraries/tbp/historyofmusic.pdf, accessed 10 May 2007.

Gallery's inception and management. Furthermore, the role that the Laing Art Gallery created for itself was similar to that of the Arts Association. The curator and committee all favoured displays with a non-regional focus, placing the exhibition stress on conventional British works, both contemporary and historical.

The main difference between the Arts Association and the Laing was the presence of the Northern Counties exhibitions. However, these exhibitions were very different to those of the Bewick Club. They did not seek to foster a local identity or to protect local artists' interests, for obvious financial reasons. In fact the exhibitions are best seen as a sideline commercial and populist venture, which increasingly focused on handicrafts and cheap amateur works. There was little aesthetic interest in these exhibitions displayed in the committee minute books. Furthermore, in the organization of these exhibitions and of the Laing itself, the views of local artists were sidelined. This ensured that their role as public arbiters of taste was also sidelined, especially as the Laing exhibited at the same time as the Bewick Club for a number of years. However, unlike at the time of the Arts Association the will of artists to agitate against such moves was sapped, as prominent members of the art community died or moved away.

Chapter Seven

Cultural Homogenization, Britishness and Centralization in Northumberland c.1930-1939.¹

The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate that conceptions of local art as second rate were once again largely unchallenged in Northumberland in the 1930s. Professional artists, who had been trained by traditionalist teachers and who did not have access to local art groups, moved away from the area or became interested in artistic themes that stemmed from Europe and the metropolis. Furthermore, the work of the Ashington Group or 'Pitmen Painters', which has been consistently seen as evidence of a '*working-class* culture' was merely a conventional art training, albeit one with unusual methods, which created a group of student artists who were highly conventional and European-focused in their work in the period before 1939. In the period younger Northumberland artists became divorced from large, popular audiences and as such their work became increasingly more abstract.

In this decade metropolitan and elite conceptions of art, expounded by the interest of Mass Observation toward Northumberland artists, Armstrong College and the Laing were strong and the countervailing forces of the local professional artists, who had championed the importance of local art in the 1890s, were weak. This shift did not represent a further homogenization of the middle and working class however, as the market for superficial local scenes remained buoyant and local and county loyalties were expressed in other areas of cultural and social life, such as in literature and sports. Instead, it represents a return to the older status quo, whereby there was no coherent or independent local art culture.

Middle-Class and Working-Class Identity

The historiography on the 1930s posits that it was the working class who most obviously felt themselves to have a local identity, just as surely as the connection between middle class and local identity is stressed in the mid-Victorian period. This stress on working-class localism coincides with stress placed on middle-class cultural homogenization and their supposed abandonment of the urban space and local identity. As

¹ This chapter ends with the beginning of the Second World War partly because of the impact of the war on all areas of culture but also because of the changes that the Ashington Group underwent from the end of the war, when they became a professional group with a written constitution.

Simon Gunn notes, 'the conventional view is that the manufacturing towns and cities witnessed a steady outflow of their traditional elites, before and after 1918, an argument which dovetails with the interpretations stressing the increasing predominance of London'.² Richard Trainor, while essentially agreeing with the idea of a nationalization of middle-class culture, notes that London's middle class did not so much come to *dominate* its provincial counterpart by 1939 ... social and political change [produced] a much more geographically *united* British middle class in which the distinction between "the provinces" and "the metropolis" lost much of its sting'.³ As Gunn himself notes there are those who disagree with the rate at which such a change in middle-class focus occurred. For example, Richard Trainor downplays the significance of such a change in the inter-war period by stressing that 'this diminution [in middle-class civic leadership] was only a partial falling off from the very high standards of the pre-1914 period'⁴ and, in his view, those cities 'more tightly tied to southern gentility than to northern industry' kept many of their middle-class civic leaders and therefore their sense of local identity.⁵

There is some evidence from local studies, however, which undermine the idea that middle-class and local identity were becoming estranged in the period, with either the explicit or tacit 'agreement' of the middle classes, especially those living in the north. Dave Russell's study of the magazine *The Heaton Review*, published in Bradford between 1927 and 1934, shows that the middle class 'celebrated some aspects of local and regional life ... [and] sought to challenge the growing cultural hegemony of London and the south east'.⁶ Furthermore, according to Russell they did so 'without marginalising the urban and the industrial in the manner so frequent within the contemporary expressions of "Englishness"'.⁷ K.D.M. Snell's study of the 'regional novel' with its 'affirmations of regional life' and 'antipathy to ... the cultural influence of

² Simon Gunn, 'Class, Identity and the Urban: the Middle Class in England, c.1790-1950', *Urban History* 31 (2004), p.p. 41-2.

³ Richard Trainor, 'Neither Metropolitan nor Provincial: The Interwar Middle Class', in Alan Kidd and David Nicholls (eds.), *The Making of the British Middle Class? Studies in Regional and Cultural Diversity since the Eighteenth Century* (Gloucestershire, 1998), p. 206, italics in original.

⁴ Richard Trainor, 'The Middle Class' in Martin Daunton (ed.), *Cambridge Urban History of Britain: Volume III 1840-1950* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 818.

⁵ Trainor, 'Neither Metropolitan nor Provincial', p. 210.

⁶ Dave Russell, 'The Heaton Review, 1927-1934: Culture, Class and a Sense of Place in Inter-War Yorkshire', *Twentieth Century British History*, 17 (2006), p. 323.

⁷ Idem.

London', reached a high point, in terms of production, in the 1930s.⁸ However, even with such studies most of the historiography maintains that by the 1930s at least, there had been a major shift in middle-class focus away from the locality and towards the metropolis and an 'English' or 'British' identity. As R. J. Morris contends 'during the 1920s and 1930s key institutional structures which had supported [middle-class local dominance and identity] began to be diminished, undermined and replaced', he notes the spread of national newspapers and the founding of the British Broadcasting Corporation as evidence of this.⁹

Morris also asserts that with the decline in middle-class identification with the urban space there was a corresponding shift that meant 'the identity of the town became a working-class one'.¹⁰ Morris he newly emerging football loyalties, later newspaper cartoons 'reflecting 1930s boyhood experience',¹¹ such as the Andy Capp series and 'regional national anthems' such as the Blaydon Races, in which the 'working-class' neighbourhood of Scotswood Road became 'a symbol of Newcastle and the Tyne', as evidence of the trend.¹²

Allied to Morris' idea of a close proximity between urban and working-class identity, other historians have stressed the importance of a more general local identity to working-class communities in the period. For example, Joanna Bourke concludes from her study of working-class narratives that amongst the working classes 'strangers from other parts of Britain were treated with distaste' and 'outsiders may never [have been] be accepted, irrespective of how long they stayed'.¹³ However, identification with the local is not seen by Bourke to have been of an insular or isolated type and indeed, her conception of the working-class' affiliation with their locality does not preclude the idea of cultural homogenization. Therefore, although she

⁸ K.D.M. Snell (ed.), *The Regional Novel in Britain and Ireland, 1800-1990* (Cambridge, 2001), p. 50.

⁹ R.J. Morris 'Structure Culture and Society in British Towns' in Martin Daunton (ed.), *Cambridge Urban History of Britain: Volume III 1840-1950* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 417.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 4. 18.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 419.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 420. R.J. Morris seems unaware that when the Blaydon Races was written by Geordie Ridley in 1862 Scotswood was a largely rural area and the north side of the road was mainly green fields. The Armstrong factory, mentioned in the song, had been built only fifteen years before and the expansion of working-class housing that the factory necessitated was in its very early stages in the 1860s. The song was popular long before the 1930s and a painting by William Irving commemorated the characters in the song in 1903.

¹³ Joanna Bourke, *Working-Class Cultures in Britain 1890-1960: Gender, Class and Ethnicity* (London, 1994), p. 167.

notes that ‘these [class] norms are not so fixed as to constitute a shared “identity”’, she also concludes that ‘while the content of such ceremonies [the Coronation celebrations] may be national in form, in character, identities were based on the locality ... This was not because the locality was generalized to represent the national, but because, for the individual, the distinction was irrelevant’.¹⁴ Indeed, Jon Lawrence notes in an overview of the literature on twentieth-century localism and nationalism that ‘there is a general agreement that more local forms of identity ... not only survived the rise of ‘Britishness’, but became integral to competing notions of what Britishness meant’.¹⁵ Therefore, as the historiography of local identity shifts in emphasis from the middle to the working class in the inter-war period, it does not characterize these identities as antagonistic to class and cultural homogenization, notions of Britishness or even centralization; as Bourke notes, ‘people’s experience locally was essentially their experience of national politics, institutions, and structures’.¹⁶ Indeed, Patrick Joyce sees local identity amongst the working class as an important forerunner of class identity. He notes ‘the association of the north ... with work and productive enterprise represent[ed] the realization of class *through* region and locale’.¹⁷

However, it is worth noting that there are some dissenting voices in this area. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries K.D.M. Snell perceives local xenophobia as a form of identity, revolving around the notion of exclusion. In fact, Snell sees this culture as a significant barrier to working-class consciousness, especially in rural areas.¹⁸ However, it is the inter-war period that Snell sees as fundamental to the decline of a local culture. He notes ‘the ... depression and its social effects ... suburbanisation ... work- and home-place separation ... de-industrialisation of solidaristic communities [and the] centralising penchants of left- and right-wing governments’ as some of the main reasons for this decline, which he sees as beginning after the First World War.¹⁹ Historians such as Snell emphasize the loss of community identity for the working class in the 1930s. Although he agrees that the importance of locality has been underplayed in the

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.p. 166-7.

¹⁵ Jon Lawrence, ‘The Politics of Place and the Politics of Nation’, *Twentieth Century History* 11 (2000), p. 83.

¹⁶ Bourke, *Working-Class Cultures*, p. 166.

¹⁷ Patrick Joyce, *Visions of the People: Industrial England and the Question of Class, 1848-1914* (Cambridge, 1991). Italics in original.

¹⁸ See: K.D.M. Snell, ‘The Culture of Local Xenophobia’, *Social History* 28 (2003).

¹⁹ K.D.M. Snell, *Parish and Belonging: Community, Identity and Welfare in England and Wales, 1700-1950* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 497.

historiography by historians 'resolute and faithful to much of the earlier agenda of the 1960s and 1970s',²⁰ which emphasized emerging class identity and saw the 1920s and 1930s Depression as the point at which working-class attachment to locality dramatically weakened.

José Harris has taken the opposite view of the inter-war period and has offered as an explanation for the 'institutional continuity in an era when governments all over Europe were being subverted',²¹ the 'regional and sectional divisions in the economy [which] tended to muffle or divert ... direct class confrontation'.²² However, all accounts of working-class identity and localism agree that there was an enduring link between the two that remained, even in a weakened form, both in rural and urban communities, until the Second World War. Similarly, they place the decline of this localist sentiment as occurring later than most of the historiography suggests was the case for the middle class.

Government Centralization

The historiographical focus on the nationalization of culture fits in with the separate, but closely linked, subject of government centralization. Janet Minihan argues that not only was the government becoming more active in education and welfare issues in the inter-war period, as Harris also highlights, but that it was also taking a renewed interest in cultural matters.²³ Interestingly, Minihan notes that 'under the impact of technology [the cinema and gramophone for example] the chasm between mass civilisation and minority culture ... continued to expand'.²⁴ She also notes however that 'the advocates of public funding for cultural facilities voiced opinions essentially similar to those put forward in the 1830s and 1840s'.²⁵ Accordingly, modern technology had merely served to highlight older debates about culture, leading legislators to voice the traditional concerns of working-class education and 'moral improvement'.²⁶

²⁰ Snell, 'The Culture of Local Xenophobia', p. 2.

²¹ José Harris, 'Society and the State in Twentieth-Century Britain', F.M.L. Thompson, (ed.), *The Cambridge Social History of Britain 1750-1950, Volume Three: Social Agencies and Institutions* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 82.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 83.

²³ See Harris, 'Society and the State'.

²⁴ Janet Minihan, *Nationalization of Culture: The Development of State Subsidies to the Arts in Great Britain* (London, 1977), p. 172.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

²⁶ *Idem.*

It would seem then that when Minihan claims that there had been a transition in the art market from 'aristocratic patronage to a middle-class, and finally mass audience', she is mainly talking of the increasing willingness of patrons and galleries to open up their collections and facilities to a wider audiences with the help of the government, just as the Ministry of Education repeatedly stressed the educational role of galleries in the 1920s and 1930s.²⁷ However, Minihan's argument does more to strengthen the case for continuity than change. The wider educational benefit of art was a belief that stretched back more than one hundred years. Similarly, there was an assumption that 'art' was created and regulated only by an elite. Even if more people could view and buy art, galleries and art training schools still set the artistic agenda.

National Identity

The Social Realism movement in British art and cinema in the 1930s is also seen by historians as fitting in with the greater emphasis on cultural homogenization and centralization. David Mellor has not only noted that 1930s artists were affected by international art and political scene, for example, themes of Modernism, economic depression and fascism, but that they felt more and more compelled to depict what they saw as conservative 'Britishness' or 'Englishness' in the face of these perceived threats from the 'modern' world, which had become interchangeable with internationalism in art.²⁸ Therefore, for Mellor, avant-garde painters such as Francis Bacon (1909-1992), Tristram Hillier (1905-1983) and John Selby Bigge (1892-1972) succumbed to a profound pessimism in the 1930s and began to focus their attentions on depictions of Britain and the destructive forces of the modern world in paintings such as Bigge's *Leviathan* (n.d.) and Hillier's *The Pylons* (1932).

Michael Saler agrees that some of the most important debates in 1930s art and Modernism revolved around 'Englishness', but for him Modernism was not, in the contemporary mind, antithetical to 'Englishness'. He argues that relationship between Modernism and Internationalism gained strength in the 1950s and has

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. xi.

²⁸ Outside of the history of art, historians such as Peter Mandler stresses that there has been an overemphasis on conservative attitudes to modernity in Britain in the inter-war period and that 'Englishness' was not necessarily anti-modern in focus. However, Mandler chooses not to engage with the work of the metropolitan artists and social commentators who were interested in industrial towns in the period. See Peter Mandler, 'Against "Englishness": English Culture and the Limits to Rural Nostalgia, 1850-1940', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6 (1997).

coloured historians' views. Saler argues that contemporaries believed that Modernism was more popular in the industrial north and that this was taken as an assertion of 'the "English" North from the more "cosmopolitan" South'.²⁹ For Saler, the subsequent popularity of the Social Realist movement was a triumph of anti-'English' Modernism and also a triumph of London-based views of England. In Mellor's narrative, the Social Realists were born from revulsion towards Continental Modernism that created a new insular focus. From this came the new role of 'artist-agent who must visit, witness, record and diagnose the vast cultural crime of slump and its disfigurement of Britain' as part of a more general move amongst writers such as J.B. Priestly and social commentators such as Humphrey Spender, Julian Trevelyan and Tom Harrison with the Mass Observation project.³⁰ Peter Mandler also asserts that the inter-war period was the era in which 'the very idea of national character reached its apogee'³¹ and that although this character 'appeared ... heterogeneous ... in contrast to the pre-war era',³² it nevertheless contained a large element of 'interiority and introspection' as well as a re-surfacing of '*fin-de-siècle* "little England" thought'.³³

Therefore, the issues of Modernism and Social Realism have consistently been read as narratives of 'Englishness' and debates over the supposed nature of the 'English character'. However, this framework fails to take into account the work of the non-professional artists who were courted by Social Realist groups such as the Artist International Association. As such, references are made to groups like the Ashington Group without taking into account anything other than the views of contemporary metropolitan artists and critics. Therefore, Frances Spalding notes: 'realism was, of course, the style best suited to the proletarian cause, and worker-artists, such as the coalminers' Ashington Group, were encouraged because lifelong experience of industry was felt to bring more realism to a subject than anything professional training could

²⁹ Michael Saler, 'Making it New: Visual Modernism and the "Myth of the North" in Interwar England', *The Journal of British Studies* 37 (1998), p. 420.

³⁰ David Mellor, 'British Art in the 1930s: Some Economic, Political and Cultural Structures' in Frank Goldsmith, (ed.), *Class, Culture and Social Change, A New View of the 1930s* (Sussex, 1980), p197.

³¹ Peter Mandler 'The Consciousness of Modernity? Liberalism and the English National Character, 1870-1940' in Martin Daunt and Bernard Reiger, (eds.), *Meanings of Modernity: Britain from the late-Victorian Era to World War Two* (Oxford, 2001), p. 132.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 133.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

supply'.³⁴ Spalding does not take into account either the fact that not all of the group were involved in industry, or more importantly, their own interpretations of their work. Similarly, Mellor asserts that the group's teacher, Robert Lyon, 'subscribed to the Populist ideal of public access to art'. However, the reference to Lyon is made in connection to the beliefs of Tom Harrison and Mass Observation, some of which Lyon did not share. By placing Lyon's opinions in such a context the Ashington Group is made to look as if it were interested in Social Realism.³⁵ As William Feaver, the biographer of the group has noted: 'the Ashington Group's alignment with Southern radicalism cannot be said to have affected it',³⁶ and indeed Feaver characterizes the group's association with Mass Observation and the Artists International Association as fleeting and somewhat patronizing to the Ashington members.

There are three main strands to the relevant historiography. Firstly, there is the idea that the middle class in this period were becoming more physically and psychologically divorced from the urban and rural birthplaces of their parents and were becoming both suburbanized and culturally nationalized, although there is some debate as to whether London necessarily dominated the culture of the middle class. By contrast, the working class are perceived as having greater ties to the area in which they lived and although there is a perceived general trend towards cultural homogenization, the historiography holds both that urban places became more closely affiliated with their working-class populations and that the working class saw national life only through the prism of local conditions.

Secondly, the historiography agrees that there was a tendency towards greater centralization within the arts. However, Minihan's argument highlights the high degree of continuity between elite attitudes to the arts from the 1830s to the 1930s and also states that although more people may have become more active in art consumption, art 'standards' were still set by its elite.

Thirdly, much of the historiography implicitly agrees with Peter Mandler's assertion that the inter-war period saw the height of concerns over national character and the hunt for a unified vision of England,

³⁴ Francis Spalding, *British Art since 1900* (London, 1986), p. 124.

³⁵ William Feaver, *Pitmen Painters, The Ashington Group 1934-1984* (Ashington, 1993), p. 194.

³⁶ Feaver, *Pitmen Painters*, p. 65.

although there is disagreement over whether this was in response to 'un-English' Modernism, or whether Modernism itself was considered 'English' at one time. The main problem with this analysis is that it fails to take into account the views of some of those involved in 'creating' this vision of 'Englishness', such as the Ashington Group and their efforts are seen purely in the terms of the London art elites who briefly courted them.

The chapter will start with an analysis of the local art scene in 1930s Northumberland. It will also show that for many of these artists the importance of an insular local art scene became a secondary issue and this was especially the case for those trained at Armstrong College. Prominent local artists became as interested in depicting other places and exploring other themes, as they were in promoting 'localist art' and many artists spent significant proportions of their career outside of the county. As a consequence, groups such as the Pen and Palette had many fewer artist members and few new Northumberland art clubs emerged.

It will then move on to explore the effect of metropolitan-guided art initiatives in the area. It will examine the strength of metropolitan-focused conceptions of art through three powerful institutions working in Northumberland. The first section will examine the role of the Laing Art Gallery, who continued to accord a low status to local art and to use the Northern Counties exhibitions as money-making ventures. The second section will look at the role of Armstrong College and its influence on young artists in the 1930s through its arts' syllabi, gallery provision and lectures. The section will also examine the artistic focus of some of the college's lecturers and more prominent students. The third section will analyse the Mass Observation project, which took a brief interest in the work of the Ashington Group. Mass Observation were central to the group's wider fame and characterized them as 'working-class representatives', despite the group's belief, before 1939, that they were art students. Finally, the chapter will caution against seeing these developments as evidence of further cultural nationalization and class homogenization, by firstly highlighting the similarities between the strength of the metropolitan view in the 1830s and 1930s and secondly demonstrating that there was an interest in local and county identity in the 1930s, both among the middle and working classes, outside of the artistic arena.

One of the most famous art 'movements' in 1930s Northumberland was that of the erroneously named 'Pitmen Painters' or Ashington Group.³⁷ This group began life as part of a Workers' Educational Association art course began in Ashington in October 1934. The class soon departed from the theoretical model of courses taught by the Workers Educational Association and the group began to study art through the practical methods of painting and criticizing. The character of the course seems to have been formulated both by the students; 'it was perfectly obvious that these men had decided views on what they did not want these classes to be';³⁸ and the course teacher Robert Lyon (1894-1978), who wrote about his teaching methods in publications such as *The Listener*.³⁹ Robert Lyon was master of painting and a lecturer in fine art at Armstrong College in Newcastle.

Armstrong College was founded in 1904 as the successor to the College of Science, which opened in 1871. It was at this time a college of the University of Durham, which it remained until 1963, when it became Newcastle University. In 1937 the college was amalgamated with the College of Medicine in Newcastle, to become King's College. The King Edward VII School of Art in Armstrong College was the main provider of art education in Northumberland. The college also housed the Hatton Gallery, which had opened in 1925 and by the 1930s displayed a number of nineteenth-century works, the pictures of the Charlton Bequest and a collection of Indian miniatures.

The Weakness of the 'Local' Art Scene

Many artists who were born, or who worked in the region in the 1930s, had only a limited interest in depicting local scenes and fostering a sense of local artistic community. Despite the fact that the market for local artists was still strong in the area, many artists spent prolonged periods of time working outside of the area and local art groups became less popular. In addition to this many artists were seeking new roles, inside and outside of the area, as illustrators, teachers, photographers, picture restorers and advertising artists.

³⁷ Not all of the members were miners. For example, Harry Wilson (n.d.) was a dental technician and Leslie Brownrigg (n.d.) was a teacher.

³⁸ Robert Lyon, 'An Approach to Art', *The Highway* (December, 1935), quoted in William Feaver, *Pitmen Painters, The Ashington Group 1934-1984* (Ashington, 1993), p.p. 17-8.

³⁹ Lyon, 'An Experiment in Art Appreciation', *The Listener* (May 1935), quoted in Feaver, *Pitmen Painters*, p. 20.

Many artists moved away from the traditional focus on depictions of local scenes in this period and this was especially true of those notable artists who had trained at the Fine Arts Department at Armstrong College. Of the 19 artists listed by Marshall Hall as having been born between c. 1895 and 1910 and having trained in that department, only four had any consistent interest in painting Northumberland or the surrounding areas.⁴⁰ These included Dorothy Carr (1902-1986) who was commissioned to paint a mural for the Pilgrim Street News Theatre, which covered four walls and which depicted 'well-known Northumbrian scenes'.⁴¹ Carr however, despite becoming known for her paintings of Northumberland and Scotland was also interested in portraiture. Byron Eric Dawson (1896-1968) exhibited at the Royal Scottish Academy in 1928 and the Royal Academy in 1928 and 1931, but after 1933 he began only to exhibit in Northumberland and his contributions to the Northern Counties exhibitions were mostly depictions of Northumberland and Yorkshire. However, he had important links to the art world outside of Northumberland and was asked, in 1940, to contribute to the Recording Britain scheme. Similarly, Walter Lishman (1903-1985), who was born in Billingham, was somewhat interested in depicting Northumbria in etchings and watercolours, although he exhibited extensively throughout the country, including at the Royal Institute of Painters in Watercolours, the National Society of Painters and Engravers and Sculptors and the Society of Graphic Artists, of which he was a member. Herbert Stanley Bynon (1898-1982), who worked in the art department of Mawson, Swan and Morgan in Newcastle, occasionally exhibited paintings of Northumberland scenes at the Northern Counties exhibitions, but also contributed etchings of the same subjects to many of the exhibitions.

However, most artists connected with the region, focused on other artistic genres. For example, William Atkin (1897-1937), who was born in South Shields and who lived in Jesmond from around 1929, sent many works to the Northern Counties exhibitions, most of which were Continental land and seascapes. Similarly, there was Frederick Charles Davison (1902-1989), who had studied at Armstrong College and who moved

⁴⁰ See Marshall Hall, *The Artists of Northumbria: An Illustrated Dictionary of Northumberland, Newcastle upon Tyne, Durham and North East Yorkshire Painters, Sculptors, Engravers, Stained Glass Designers, Illustrators, Caricaturists and Cartoonists born Between 1625 and 1950* (Bristol, 2003); Laing Art Gallery and Museum, *Catalogues of Exhibitions of Works by Artists of the Northern Counties, Volume One, 1905-1922* (n.d.); Laing Art Gallery and Museum, *Catalogues of Exhibitions of Works by Artists of the Northern Counties, Volume Two, 1923-1935* (n.d.); Laing Art Gallery and Museum, *Catalogues of Exhibitions of Works by Artists of the Northern Counties, Volume Three, 1936-1949* (n.d.).

⁴¹ Hall, *The Artists of Northumbria*, p. 72.

back to the area in 1936, settling at Tynemouth. Davison's preferred genre was watercolour landscapes and like Atkin he sent mostly Continental scenes to the Northern Counties exhibitions. Louisa Hodgson (1905-1980) mainly painted both imaginative subjects and portraits and sent many of the latter to the Northern Counties exhibitions. Joyce Deighton Dixon (c.1899-c.1950) sent mainly flower paintings to the Northern Counties exhibitions, as did Rosina Beatrice Wild (b.1898), who had not studied at Armstrong College, but at the Gateshead School of Art.

Furthermore, most of the artists trained at Armstrong College spent part, if not all of their careers, outside of the local area. Dudley Dixon (c.1900-after 1948) and his sister Joyce Deighton Dixon (c.1899-after 1950), both studied art at Armstrong College, but soon after settled in London. They both sent work to the Northern Counties exhibitions, but this was only one of many galleries to which they sent work, including the Royal Scottish Academy, Royal Hibernian Academy, London's Walker's Gallery, the Royal Cambrian Academy, the Royal Institute of Oil Painters and the Shipley Gallery in Gateshead. Joyce also exhibited at the Royal Academy, the Paris Salon and the Society of Women Artists. Leslie Donovan Gibson (1910-1969) studied at Armstrong College and then at the Royal College of Art in the early 1930s. He later travelled extensively and never re-settled in Northumberland nor became a regular exhibitor at the Northern Counties exhibitions, showing instead at galleries such as the National Gallery of Canada and the Royal Scottish Academy.

John Thomas Young Gilroy (1898-1985) moved away from Northumberland during his active service in the First World War and again did not return to the area. He later furthered his studies at the Royal College of Art and worked on many Royal portrait commissions. He did send work to the Northern Counties exhibitions for a few years in the 1930s, but, as with the Dixons, this was only a small part of his exhibition output, which was also shown at the Royal Academy, Royal Institute of Oil Painters and the Fine Art Society. Arthur Green (1894-1988) was an amateur painter, who studied part-time at Armstrong College and later became an aircraft engineer, but even he did not concentrate his artistic output on Northumberland. He spent long periods outside of the county because of his work and, as well as contributing to the Northern Counties exhibitions, he also sent work to the Royal Academy.

James Walker Tucker (1898-1972) won two travelling scholarships, the first to France in 1922 from Armstrong College and the second to Italy from the Royal College of Art, where he later studied, in 1927. In the 1920s and 1930s he exhibited at the Royal Academy and assisted Sir William in his mural for St Stephen's Hall in Westminster as well as painting a lunette for the Laing Art Gallery, entitled *The Entry of Charles I into Newcastle-upon-Tyne* (1931). Similarly, James Lindsay Bird (1905-1972) moved from Armstrong College to the Royal College of Art and then lived for some years in Italy. He exhibited work at the Northern Counties exhibitions but also at the Royal Academy and at other London galleries and his most important works were commissions for Royal portraits. This was similar to the work of Eleanor Baty (c.1900-after 1938), who was not trained at Armstrong College, but who nevertheless gained most notoriety from paintings of Royals and prominent public figures, despite the fact that she was based in Newcastle during the period. Elizabeth Clayton Bartles (c.1905-after 1936), who was born in Newcastle, chose to study art in London, Cardiff and Newlyn. She did not become a regular exhibitor in Newcastle and regularly exhibited instead in London and Paris, where she showed works painted on her travels to America, southern Europe, east Africa and the Caribbean.⁴²

Similarly, many of the artists who were connected with Northumberland in the 1930s and many who taught at Armstrong College combined the career of a professional painter with other art-related professions such as art teaching, illustrating, advertising, photography and picture restoration. For example, Elizabeth Bartels, Walter Lishman, James Bird, Isabella Horton Havery (b.1911)-who taught art as occupation therapy in Doncaster and Sheffield-Byron Dawson, James Doxford (1899-1978)-who taught in Gateshead and Barnstable-Louisa Hodgson, Leslie Gibson, Frederick Davison and John Gilroy all spent some time as art teachers, sometimes at Armstrong College. Similarly, Osborne Rasmussen (1896-1967), Edward Jeffrey (1898-1978), James Bird and Joseph Gray (1890-1963), who was also a war artist in the Second World War, became newspaper, book and magazine illustrators for at least part of their careers. John Gilroy's most famous work from the 1930s was in advertising posters. For example, he designed the *Guinness for Strength* and the animal posters for the Guinness Company, including the *Lovely Day for a Guinness* series. Dorothy Carr became a photographer after some years undertaking mural-painting work for a Newcastle

⁴² All of the biographical information is taken from Hall, *The Artists of Northumbria*.

decorating firm. Herbert Bynon and Louisa Hodgson became picture restorers after the Second World War.

Charles Bertram worked as a painter and sculptor for local architectural firms in the 1930s.



6.1 One of John Gilroy's *Lovely Day for a Guinness* Posters

As local, notable artists moved away and diversified, both in profession and genre, local support networks also disintegrated. The Pen and Palette Club, which had been dominated by artists at the beginning of the century, now saw artist numbers rapidly dwindling. In *Memories of Some Old Members*, written in 1940 the author mentioned that 'the medical profession is still well represented ... as it was in the beginning', but 'forty years ago ... the "palette" was also well represented'.⁴³ The number of Pen and Palette Club members increased dramatically between 1930 and 1935, when 92 new members joined. However, only four were either professional artists or notable amateurs. These were Robert Lyon, the Art Master at Armstrong College and the two older local artists Allan Douglas Maids (1881-1945) and Frank S. Ogilvie (c.1859-1935). Therefore, 86 of the 92 who joined had no connection to the world of pictorial arts, sculptor, engraving, carving, illustrating or art teaching.⁴⁴

⁴³ 'C.W.' (Charles Williams), 'Memories of Some Old Members (1940)', in Pen and Palette Club, *The First Ninety Years, 1900-1990* (n.d.), n.p.

⁴⁴ All figures come from the membership lists in Pen and Palette Club, *Pen and Palette Club Papers, Vol.2, 1933-1937* (n.d.). There are no membership lists for between 1935-1939 and there are a further two men on the membership lists who may have been artists as they have similar names to artists included in Hall's *Artists of Northumbria*.

There seems also to have been a decline in interest in contemporary art at the club. The club's main staircase was decorated by the portraits of former artist members such as Robert Jobling, Charles Mitchell, whose portrait had been painted by Thomas Eyre Macklin (1867-1943)⁴⁵ and Aaron Watson by Arthur Hardwick Marsh, as well as the work of older artists, who were not members of the club but some of whom were asked to give talks, such as H.H. Emmerson, George Clausen and Walter Crane (1845-1915). These works had been painted in the 1890s and 1900s and they had not been joined by any new paintings for many years. Indeed, by 1931 the author of *Club Staircase* justified his piece by noting that 'to the old members the walls of the modest Hall and staircase ... are alive with memories. To a later generation they should not be meaningless'.⁴⁶

Notable artists either born or educated locally at Armstrong College and who were professionally active in the 1930s were unlikely to be interested in a career which focused on the depiction of Northumberland. Some did produce such work, the most notable of whom was George Beattie McVay (1902-1967), a self-taught amateur artist and council worker, who contributed many local scenes to the Northern Counties exhibitions from 1923, but his work was the exception rather than the rule. Many did exhibit at the Northern Counties exhibitions, but much of what they did exhibit was portraiture and Continental scenes and they sent work to the Laing as only part of a much wider exhibiting career. Furthermore, many diversified into artistic careers outside of painting, most notably teaching and illustrating. Furthermore, local support networks disintegrated in such circumstances. The reasons for this shift in artistic focus amongst the artists of the 1930s were more complex than a collapse in the local market for Northumberland scenes however. It also had much to do with the type of education that many had received at Armstrong College.

The Laing and Treatment of Local Art

The focus of the Laing Art Gallery's Northern Counties exhibitions continued to be on sales. The committee member Colonel Higginbottom suggested in 1935 that 'more publicity might be given to the fact

⁴⁵ Macklin also designed the Boer War memorial at the Haymarket in Newcastle.

⁴⁶ 'C.W.' (Charles Williams), 'The Club Staircase (1931)' in Pen and Palette Club, *The First Ninety Years*, n.p. It is important to note that there were also other small art groups in the area including Benwell Art Club and West End Art Club, although no information on these clubs survives.

that all works included in the exhibition were for sale⁴⁷ and for the 1931 exhibition 16 of the exhibited pictures were turned into postcards, of which 237 had been sold by November.⁴⁸ The Laing continued to sell local art relatively well through the Northern Counties exhibitions. In 1935 for example, the gallery had 14,000 visitors attending the exhibition, it sold 1010 catalogues and sold three paintings for £17 12s.⁴⁹ This continued to rise so that in 1937 eleven works were sold for £17 9s and in 1938, 20 were sold for £100 8s.⁵⁰ The Laing Committee Minutes do not mention which paintings were sold, but because of the fact that in 1937 eleven were sold for a combined total of only £17 12s and yet in 1938 20 were sold over £100, one can assume that there was a large price differential between some of the works sold.⁵¹ If one also considers the fact that in 1931 and 1933 alone there were 40,000 visitors to the exhibitions, it seems highly probable that the interest in local art was still shared by a broad cross-section of society in Newcastle and the surrounding areas.⁵²

However, there were many fewer local scenes on display than at the turn of the century and these were mainly confined to the watercolour and etchings sections, whereas the oil paintings section tended to be dominated by portraits. In 1933 for example, only 18 of the 169 watercolours depicted Northumberland scenes. There were only two such scenes in the oil painting section, which contained 101 works. In fact these two oil paintings were amongst the cheapest in price and the picture *The Beck, Wallsend Park* (n.d.) by Samuel Dowell was marked for sale at only £6 6s.⁵³ The two most expensive pieces on sale that year were *The Lyre Player* (n.d.) by Robert Lyon and a decorative panel entitled *Evolution* (n.d.), which was for sale for £220.⁵⁴

Northumberland scenes fared slightly better in the 1936 exhibition. Of the 137 watercolours, 20 were of Northumberland scenes, six of the 95 on screens depicted Northumberland and six of the 101 oil paintings

⁴⁷ Laing Art Gallery, Committee Minute Book, Volume Five, TWAS., ND/NC 129/5, 22 April 1935.

⁴⁸ Laing Art Gallery, Committee Minute Book, Volume Four, TWAS., ND/NC 129/4, 27 November 1931.

⁴⁹ Laing Art Gallery, Committee Minute Book, Volume Five, 22 April 1935.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

⁵¹ Laing Art Gallery, Committee Minute Book, Volume Five, 28 January 1938.

⁵² Laing Art Gallery, Committee Minute Book, Volume Four, 27 March 1931 and 31 March 1933.

⁵³ Laing Art Gallery and Museum, 'Catalogue of the Exhibition of Works by Artists of the Northern Counties, 1933', p. 13.

⁵⁴ Laing Art Gallery, 'Catalogue ... 1933', p.p. 13-4.

were of this type. Again however, these were amongst some of the cheapest pieces. The most expensive of the Northumberland oil paintings was Robert Lyon's *Winter Sunshine, Corbridge* (n.d.) an unusual attempt by Lyon to paint a Northumberland scene. It was priced at £42 and was £21 more expensive than the next most expensive Northumberland scene.⁵⁵ Even so, it was dwarfed in price by *The Rhone Valley* (n.d.) by William Rothenstein (1872-1945),⁵⁶ a famous artist who had been born in Yorkshire but had moved away from the area in 1881 and had been close to members of the New English Art Club in the 1890s.⁵⁷

There were similar numbers of Northumberland scenes at the 1939 exhibition. There were 13 such works amongst the 147 watercolours and four amongst the 94 oils, two of which were not for sale and the other two were priced at £7 or less. The most expensive piece at that exhibition was *Miss Wendy Hiller* by the Royal Academician and respected London portrait painter Thomas Cantrell Dougdale (1880-1952).⁵⁸

The Laing did show some interest in the artists of Northumberland and Northumberland history in the 1930s. In 1934 they staged an exhibition of the works of Thomas Bowman Garvie, George Horton and John Falconer Slater which attracted over 16,000 visitors.⁵⁹ Similarly, there was an exhibition of Ralph Hedley's work in 1938, which was viewed by over 13,000 visitors. The gallery committee noted that it was 'one of the most popular exhibitions held at the gallery for some time'.⁶⁰ The Hedley exhibition was only partially to be taken seriously. In addition to the usual group of local notables invited to the private viewing there were invites sent to all the people known to have been used as models for the paintings on exhibit. It seems then that the exhibition was as much intended to be a nostalgic event as display of art. The Ashington Group displayed their work at a dedicated exhibition at the Laing in 1938. The committee set

⁵⁵ Laing Art Gallery, 'Catalogue of the Exhibition of Works by Artists of the Northern Counties, 1936', p. 13.

⁵⁶ Laing Art Gallery, 'Catalogue ... 1936', p. 16.

⁵⁷ Lago, Mary 'Sir William Rothenstein', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, at www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/35842?docPos=3, viewed 10 July 2007.

⁵⁸ Laing Art Gallery and Museum, 'Catalogue of the Exhibition of Works by Artists of the Northern Counties, 1939', p. 15.

⁵⁹ Laing Art Gallery, Committee Minute Book, Volume Five, 25 January 1935.

⁶⁰ Laing Art Gallery, Committee Minute Book, Volume Five, 13 January 1938.

aside four guineas, or around £4 4s for the purchase of exhibition work, a price which was roughly equivalent to the sale price of a cheap oil painting at the Northern Counties exhibition.⁶¹

There was also a series of lunettes depicting Northumberland history commissioned for the gallery in the early 1830s. The artists chosen for these tended to be those working or training in the Fine Art Department of Armstrong College. Furthermore, unlike the scenes of Northumberland painted by William Bell Scott for Lady Trevelyan, these lunettes concentrated on Newcastle's history and emphasized the links between Newcastle and the rest of Britain. Therefore, Byron Dawson's was *John Baliol Paying Homage to Edward the First at Newcastle, in 1292* (n.d.) and James Tucker's was entitled *The Entry of Charles I into Newcastle upon Tyne* (n.d.).⁶²

The committee's commitment to Northumberland art was not continuous. Following the 1934 exhibition of Garvie, Horton and Slater, the committee received a letter from Edward Jeffrey of Kenton suggesting that 'an exhibition be held every year by three northern artists, along the similar lines'. He also suggested that these artists were 'natives of the district' and that at least one of them should be unknown, so as to 'give credit and acknowledgement to such artists when such was most needed and due'.⁶³ Discussion of the letter was postponed until the following meeting and then forgotten. Similarly, in 1935 C. Bernard Stevenson suggested 'the desirability of obtaining further works by contemporary artists of the northern counties'.⁶⁴ The response was an agreement to buy a painting by Percy Lancaster (1878-1951) who was born in Manchester and who spent most of his life in Southport. The subject was not raised again.

The Laing Art Gallery remained as unfocused on Northumberland art work as it had at any time in its history. The emphasis on the Northern Counties exhibition was firstly on sales and secondly on securing highly-priced works from celebrated national and international artists who had some link to the north of England. However, from the money raised by the exhibitions and the high visitor numbers it would seem that there was some, not inconsiderable, public interest in northern, if not Northumbrian art. The

⁶¹ Laing Art Gallery, Committee Minute Book, Volume Five, 25 March 1938.

⁶² Hall, *The Artists of Northumbria*, p. 102 and p. 345.

⁶³ Laing Art Gallery, Committee Minute Book, Volume Five, 25 January 1938.

⁶⁴ Laing Art Gallery, Committee Minute Book, Volume Five, 26 July 1935.

exhibitions of Garvie, Horton and Slater as well as Hedley show that there was also a sustained interest in the work of Northumberland artists specifically. However, the gallery's commitment to such art was not continuously sustained and remained of secondary importance.

Armstrong College and Professional Art Training

The syllabus for the Fine Art Department at Armstrong College was very traditional. In order to pass the first year of the fine arts course in 1935 and 1936, the candidate had to have completed a practical exercise in either 'drawing the head ... painting still life ... composition ... [producing a] superficial pattern or modelling', as well as have taken papers in the history of Italian and Flemish art from the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries.⁶⁵ In order to complete the degree a candidate had to undertake a further technical piece, a paper in sculpture, two papers in art history and a special-subject paper on 'some phase, period, or subject' taught in the department. Furthermore the candidates had to complete a certificate of proficiency in a modern language.⁶⁶

In addition to this the lecturers at the department were rarely interested in depictions of Northumberland life. Robert Lyon, the Master of Painting, between 1932 and 1942, was born in Liverpool and had been taught at the Royal College of Art and later at the British School in Rome. Most of his exhibited paintings at the Royal Academy were portraits, designs and historical subjects, as well as landscapes of various places. This was also true of his exhibits to the Northern Counties exhibitions, where he displayed some of his portrait commissions. For example, in 1933 he exhibited two oil paintings *Lyre Player*, priced at £300 and *Miss Ruth Westcott* (n.d.), which was not for sale.⁶⁷ Similarly, in 1936, as well as *Winter Sunshine*, *Corbridge* (n.d.), he also displayed *Moss Kennels* (n.d.).⁶⁸ In 1939 he exhibited *Mrs Hicks* (n.d.), *Mrs Isabel Shave* (n.d.) and *Miss Joyce Fenwick* (n.d.), all of which were not for sale.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Durham University, *Durham University Calendar 1935-1936* (Newcastle, 1935), p. 159.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

⁶⁷ Laing Art Gallery, 'Catalogue ... 1933', p. 13 and p. 11.

⁶⁸ Laing Art Gallery, 'Catalogue ... 1936', p. 13 and p. 15.

⁶⁹ Laing Art Gallery and Museum, 'Catalogue ... 1939', p. 16, p. 12 and p. 17.

At the same time the Professor of Fine Art was Allan Douglas Mainds (1881-1945), who was also a member of the Pen and Palette Club and on the Laing Art Gallery Committee. Mainds was born in Glasgow and had already taught at that city's Art School before moving to Newcastle. He was more of a portrait painter and designer than a landscape artist and, in any case, his landscapes were never often inspired by Northumberland. Very few of his paintings in the 1930s Northern Counties exhibitions depicted Northumberland. In 1939 he exhibited an oil painting entitled *Early Spring* (n.d.) and a portrait of *The Embroidress* (n.d.), which was not for sale.⁷⁰ He also exhibited a portrait at the 1936 exhibition of *Mrs J.K. Wilson Pepper* (n.d.), his only exhibition that year,⁷¹ as was *Interior* (n.d.) in 1933.⁷²

Also, during the 1920s and 1930s, the Assistant Teacher in Painting was Louisa Hodgson, who as has already been mentioned, was interested in imaginative and portrait subjects. It was these that she displayed at the Northern Counties exhibitions in the 1930s, including *Miss Rosamund Willis* (n.d.) in 1933⁷³ and *The Birth of Venus* (n.d.) in 1939, which was marked for sale at £210.⁷⁴ Hodgson's Assistant in Painting was Thomas W. Pattison (1894-1983). He exhibited landscapes of many areas of the country including *Durham Castle* (n.d.) in 1933,⁷⁵ the watercolour *Red Cullins, Isle of Skye* (n.d.) and *Cheviots from Ford* (n.d.) in 1936,⁷⁶ portraits such as *Consul Louis Zollner* (n.d.) and *Rachel, Daughter of Ralph le Fleming* (n.d.)⁷⁷ and sculptures such as *Wyllian* (n.d.).⁷⁸

The college's public lecture series sometimes focussed on art. However, these were never dedicated to a local art topic and often London-based critics and artists were invited to give these lectures. Therefore in the academic year 1934-1935 Nicolaus Pevsner (1902-1983), whose successful work *An Enquiry into Industrial Art in England* (1937) was already being written, gave a lecture on Albrecht Dürer.⁷⁹ Similarly, there was a short-course of lectures on art in 1936-1937. The first was entitled 'The Place of the Artist in

⁷⁰ Laing Art Gallery and Museum, 'Catalogue ... 1939', p. 16 and p. 15

⁷¹ Laing Art Gallery and Museum, 'Catalogue ... 1936', p. 14.

⁷² Laing Art Gallery and Museum, 'Catalogue ... 1933', p. 11.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁷⁴ Laing Art Gallery and Museum, 'Catalogue ... 1939', p. 16.

⁷⁵ Laing Art Gallery and Museum, 'Catalogue ... 1933', p. 4.

⁷⁶ Laing Art Gallery and Museum, 'Catalogue ... 1936', p. 7 and p. 15.

⁷⁷ Laing Art Gallery and Museum, 'Catalogue ... 1939', p. 15.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁷⁹ Durham University, *Durham University Calendar 1935-1936*, p. 334.

Society' and was given by Edward Halliday (1902-1984).⁸⁰ Halliday was born in Liverpool and may have known Lyon through his connection to the city. He was also a very successful portrait painter and interior designer and had already given two lecture series on BBC radio, including 'Artists at Work' in 1932.⁸¹ Two of the other lectures were on the meaning of modern art and Lyon also gave some talks on 'Art in Our Time' and 'The Painter: his Function and his Public'.⁸²

The fine art course given at Armstrong College was designed to train aspiring professional artists, artist-craftsmen and designers. The academic, as opposed to the practical side of this training comprised of a traditional art history syllabus which, unsurprisingly, did not even give much space to British art, let alone the artist's place in Northumberland society. Unlike William Bell Scott, who had taught in Newcastle some 70 years previously, the art masters at Armstrong College in the 1920s and 1930s were uninterested in painting Northumberland scenes and neither did they see their role as a specifically local one.

The Ashington Group and Mass Observation

Much of the historiographical literature suggests growing class homogeneity on one hand and a more firm imaginative link between the working class and their city or town on the other. As such Joanna Bourke's idea that the working class saw national issues through the prism of their locality seems to have been best illustrated in 1930s Northumberland by the work of the Ashington Group. Interpretations of the group's work have been heavily influenced by the Mass Observation volunteers who first brought the group to the nation's notice. The views of the Ashington Group themselves are very rarely heard in the historiography. What a study of such views suggests is that far from seeing themselves as working-class artists or Social or Socialist Realists, they saw themselves in a very conservative manner as art students undertaking a traditional artistic education, even if this was conveyed by unorthodox methods.

Mass Observation, in the form of Tom Harrison, first visited the Ashington Group in 1938. Harrison believed that the group's artistic worth came from the fact that its 'unsophisticated ... experience' meant

⁸⁰ Durham University, *Durham University Calendar 1937-1938* (Newcastle, 1938), p. 301.

⁸¹ Butler, George. 'Halliday, Edward Irvine', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, at www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/31191, viewed 10 July 2007.

⁸² Durham University, *Durham University Calendar 1937-1938*, p.p. 300-1.

that its members were 'directly in touch with everyday problems of normal relations ... altogether a different world from Chelsea, Bloomsbury or Montparnasse'.⁸³ Harrison also noted that '[it was] the art of realism that interested me in Ashington'.⁸⁴ This was important to Harrison as, for him, politics and art were using 'pre-industrial language' because although 'in the last one hundred years [there had been] the mass vote [and] mass literacy, painting [had] done nothing to cope with that'. Furthermore, he believed that 'artists today are detached, as never before, from the culture he lives in [sic]. Art has no social role-or rather "art" has no social role, here today'.⁸⁵ Therefore, art like 'science, like [the] church, politics, poetry [were all] out of touch'. According to Harrison this meant that 'less and less people vote and politics gets apathetic'.⁸⁶ The answer was the work of Social Realists, although Harrison was keen to point out this did not necessarily mean Socialist Realists and he realised the success of contemporary realistic films.

The Ashington Group and other working-class painters were for Harrison therefore the best means by which the working class may be politicized. His work with the group was meant only as a preliminary step to a wider movement. As he noted in the catalogue to the Unprofessional Painting Exhibition, one of the objectives of that exhibition was to 'make contact with other working-class painters wherever they are and there are indications that there are hundreds'.⁸⁷ To emphasize his point he initiated a debate as part of the Bensham Grove exhibition, the motion of which was 'anyone can paint'. The debate was joined by members of the Ashington Group and professional artists from London and the motion was carried by 20 votes.⁸⁸

Tom Harrison's views were obviously shaped by the experiences which had informed his book *Savage Civilisation* (1937). For Harrison what was special about Ashington was its physical and social remoteness from London, whilst still being part of England. Paradoxically, for him, it was the group's remoteness that made its voice all the more authentic and better able to make art more relevant. James R. Spencer writing

⁸³ Bensham Grove Settlement, *Unprofessional Painting*, quoted in *Sunday Sun*, 25 September, 1938.

⁸⁴ Tom Harrison, handwritten notes for a lecture to be given on the 13 October 1938, Mass Observation Archive, Topic Collection TC33 ART 1938-1949, University of Sussex Special Collections.

⁸⁵ Tom Harrison, typed draft of proposed book format, M.O.A., TC33/1/B.

⁸⁶ Idem.

⁸⁷ *Sunday Sun*, 25 September, 1938.

⁸⁸ *Northern Echo*, 17 October 1938.

for the *Sunday Sun* was enthusiastic that Harrison and Trevelyan had made this 'discovery' because he noted, 'for years I have felt it was a great tragedy that all the wonderful "native" talent in our North-Country ... should be allowed to waste ... the people of the North live close to Nature ... they have something to tell the world ... that comes hot ... from the very earth and sky'.⁸⁹ The views of Harrison and Spencer seem at first to be similar, however, Spencer makes no reference to the virtues of the group as being class-based virtues. For him, the Ashington Group did not embody a class, but it embodied the north-east and all the 'talent ... of its painters and its poets and its thinkers'.⁹⁰

However, the Ashington Group did not see their work as either a form of class or regional identity. In the minds of the group they painted pictures 'because we want to paint them'.⁹¹ Furthermore, their teaching was surprisingly traditional, for all its unusual methods. Robert Lyon was not interested in helping the group become professional artists and this was, in any case, against Workers' Educational Association rules. However, he did wish to give them 'a creative experience' that would 'help them appreciate better the creative experience in others' and teach them 'something about the subject'. Lyon noted that there were two ways of doing this: 'one is to study the subject historically ... to learn to admire ... to contemplate ... and so to form a standard of values'. Teaching by that method however was 'a long business' and one which 'produces conventionality, timidity and even insincerity of mind' ... the other approach is to learn by doing, to develop an appreciation through an inside knowledge through actual working in the materials'. This however included 'discussion of the different techniques used in a Botticelli, a Van Dyck and a Goya ... lectures and practical demonstration'.⁹² The method therefore was one which was designed to allow the group to better appreciate art and the technicalities of the artistic process. It was a lesson which the group appreciated, as George Rowe wrote: 'I fail to see how anyone can participate fully in the joys of looking at pictures if he has had no attempt at picture-making himself'.⁹³ Indeed, Lyon's teaching did so without allowing the group to ascribe too much importance to outside opinions. Lyon's teaching was therefore not radical in intention and the group was not primed to use art as a form of social expression.

⁸⁹ *Sunday Sun*, 25 September, 1838.

⁹⁰ *Idem*.

⁹¹ *Daily Herald*, 16 January 1939.

⁹² All quotes from *The Listener*, 29 May 1935.

⁹³ *The Ashington Collieries Magazine*, June 1937, p. 154.

Members of the group painted their immediate surroundings not as a form of class expression or social protest but because they were interested in painting what was around them. As William Feaver notes, '[Lyon] had no thought of encouraging the systematic depiction of Ashington life or of stimulating what the politically minded took to be "proletarian" art', for the group themselves the works became nothing more than 'factual accounts of what everyone in Ashington felt and knew', 'the recording of an existence as remote from prettiness or high aesthetics as could be'.⁹⁴ Natasha Vall notes that 'the group's ambition [was] to depict Ashington life',⁹⁵ she also notes that the Ashington Group were obdurate and indeed, for Vall 'it is less clear what influences the group responded to positively'.⁹⁶ For example, Oliver Kilbourn (1904-1993) painted many scenes of life in the pit and he did so because he wanted to depict exactly what the different jobs entailed, in order to give the viewer a sense of how 'awkward' but yet 'graceful' the work could be, 'like a dance step 123 ... like a matador with a bull',⁹⁷ providing a stark contrast to the 'exaggerated awfulness of George Orwell's depictions of mining life'.⁹⁸



Above: 7.2 Oliver Kilbourn *Salvage Drawers* (1945) and 7.3 Jimmy Floyd (n.d.) *Pigeon Cries* (c.1938). Below: Figure 7.4 Harry Wilson *Roundabouts and Swings* (1937) and Andy Forman (n.d.) *The Bar, Playing Dominoes* (c.1936).

⁹⁴ Idem.

⁹⁵ Natasha Vall, 'Bohemians and "Pitmen Painters" in North East England, 1930-1970', *Visual Culture in Britain* 5 (2004), p. 4.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 6.

⁹⁷ Oliver Kilbourn, *My Life as a Pitman: Catalogue of Paintings as Woodhorn Colliery Museum* (Ashington, 1992), p. 7.

⁹⁸ Vall, 'Bohemians and 'Pitmen Painters'', p. 5.



Members of the group were also conservative in their attitude towards art. In a series of articles on art appreciation published in *The Ashington Collieries Magazine* in 1936, members of the group, including Oliver Kilbourn, Andrew Foreman (n.d.) and Edwin Harrison (n.d.), wrote on subjects such as beauty, Surrealism, sculpture and Leonardo da Vinci. For them art had not lost its relevance. Leslie Brownrigg commented on the religious importance of *The Last Supper*, ‘to countless Christians since his day this painting has brought to life that immortal event and when the last supper is mentioned it is to Leonardo’s picture that we think’.⁹⁹ George Rowe (n.d.) listed the five possible things an artist may be hoping to achieve through a painting: ‘to tell a story ... to depict a scene ... to express and emotion ... to express an experience outside the bounds of conscious experience’.¹⁰⁰ Not only was this a conservative reading of art four years after Unit 1 had described their work as being ‘a hard defence, a compact wall against the tide of nationalism’, but also, for Rowe, the purpose of art was non-political.¹⁰¹

Edwin Harrison wrote on seventeenth-century Dutch art and although he noted that the ‘excursion into everyday things and places’ for such artists was something of a revolution given that ‘democratic, almost “lowbrow” conception of art was in direct contrast to ... more aristocratic traditions’, he believed that the main achievement of the Dutch painters was not the political consequences of painting the everyday but rather that such art ‘sharpen[ed] the eye for the beauty which lies all around us, even in pitheads and

⁹⁹ *The Ashington Collieries Magazine*, May 1937, p. 125.

¹⁰⁰ *The Ashington Collieries Magazine*, June 1937, p. 153.

¹⁰¹ *The Times*, 2 June 1933, quoted in Goldsmith, *Class, Culture and Social Change*, p. 188.

pithead gear'.¹⁰² Similarly, George Brownrigg's article 'Our Interest in Art' was little more than a chronology of European art concluding with the line 'modern art is a record of our present day'.¹⁰³

Andy Foreman's article on modern art warned about the spiritual decay of the modern age and argued that art could not be socially useful until society itself stopped being so preoccupied with 'the pursuit of pleasure, amusement, excitement, lust [and] greed'.¹⁰⁴ This was the exact opposite to Tom Harrison's ideas on the value of art. For Harrison an 'aristocratic' art had failed to keep pace with society and a new art was needed to communicate social and socialist truths to the masses. For Foreman, the great artists had always been interested in reflecting their age, but the modern world supplied them only with themes 'not worthy of the great artist's skill'.¹⁰⁵ For Foreman the problem of modern art was not a class bias built into art itself but rather a moral decay in the world itself. Indeed, such a conclusion accords with the outlook of the group as a whole as they were, for the most part, both tee-total and strict Methodists.

The Ashington Group's work is rarely seen outside of their association with Mass Observation and such a perspective leads one to see the group as protagonists of, or at least a vehicle for, Social and Socialist Realism. There were some incidences where members painted for a social purpose. Harry Wilson's *The Drain* (n.d.) for instance was intended to show poor sanitary conditions and much of Wilson's work was of this type. However, as Feaver asserts, 'when members of the group put into pictures some of their resentments, they weren't so much propagandizing as reminding one another of what they knew to be true' however there was no consistent message on this topic in his work.¹⁰⁶ Similarly, Arthur Whinnom (n.d.) described his paintings as 'not pictures in the accepted sense of the word but ... essays in the use of materials.'¹⁰⁷ Before the Second World War the group were interested in painting primarily as a way to better understanding and appreciating art. They were often conservative in their outlook and they were interested in painting their lives, with little *intentional* deeper political significance.

¹⁰² *The Ashington Collieries Magazine*, July 1937, p180.

¹⁰³ *The Ashington Collieries Magazine*, September 1937, p. 240.

¹⁰⁴ *The Ashington Collieries Magazine*, December 1937, p. 330.

¹⁰⁵ *Idem*.

¹⁰⁶ Feaver, *Pitmen Painters*, p. 69.

¹⁰⁷ Arthur Whinnom, quoted from an unknown source in Feaver, *Pitmen Painters*, p. 69.

The historiography erroneously links the work of the Ashington Group to those 1930s movements that were interested in Social and Socialist Realism such as Mass Observation and the Artist International Association. Because of this their work has been seen to have been both 'working-class art' and evidence of the working-class' wider political awareness-and therefore greater cultural homogenization- seen through their strong links with their locality. However, such a conclusion is only tenable if one sees the group only from the perspective of the London-based radical movements who interpreted them. In reality the group were not interested in expressing political opinion in their work and neither were they consistently interested in presenting a particular view of Ashington, Northumberland or the north in general. What the group's work does show, at least until the Second World War, is the psychological isolation of such communities. The group painted from their own lives and, from their art, these lives seem to have been lived almost entirely within the parameters of one town. The Depression had not, as Snell argues, affected Ashington's sense of community and the paintings are testament to the localization of culture that still existed even in some industrialized parts of Northumberland.

The Decline in Artistic Localism

Notable local artists were no longer concerned with producing work about county life for the consumption of collectors based in the locality. However, there is some evidence that the middle class were not feeling alienated from their locality or a greater level of cultural homogenization within the middle class. Many of the middle class continued to be interested in county issues and the celebration of county identity.

Groups such as the Northumberland and Newcastle Society were interested in preserving the county from the worst effects of centralization and technology. A 1930s report from the society noted that: 'the regard for this aspect of our landscapes and streets must grow at a rapid rate if it is to check the misdirected zeal of certain advertisers and builders'.¹⁰⁸ The society was popular. It had 229 members in 1938 and published the *Middle Marches* magazine. Membership of the society was, however, restricted to members of the middle class. The annual subscription fee was 10 shillings and associate membership cost six shillings.

¹⁰⁸ Northumberland and Newcastle Society, *Reports 1935-1938* (n.p.), p. 6.

Indeed, the membership list contained many Justices of the Peace, as well as several titled members, doctors and O.B.E.'s.

Furthermore, there are striking similarities between the 1830s and the 1930s which undermine the idea that the decrease in localist sentiment amongst Northumberland's art community was due to cultural nationalization. In both decades artistic taste was set by institutions with a London focus, such as the Newcastle Society for the Promotion of Fine Art in the 1830s and the Laing Art Gallery in the 1930s. This was bolstered by artistic elites who voiced their opinions through the Laing Art Gallery in the 1930s and through newspapers and patronage in the 1830s. Notable artists developed their careers away from merely painting to areas such as teaching, engraving and designing in both decades and so strong and uncontested was the conception of taste-with its universalistic overtones-that artists were unwilling or unable to challenge these conceptions.

Conclusion

The historiography of 1930s culture emphasizes three things. Firstly, class homogenization, which, for the middle class meant a change in focus from their locality towards London-based institutions such as the British Broadcasting Corporation and for the working class meant that national life became more important, although it was still mediated through the experiences within the locality. Secondly, there is an emphasis on government centralization and the greater impact that cultural homogenization had when one had been through the university or public-school system. Thirdly, there is an emphasis on the search for British or English identity that affected artists as they turned away from Continental Modernism.

From an analysis of Northumberland in the 1930s much of this historiography seems to hold true for the area. Those who were educated at the Newcastle branch of Durham University were exposed to an art education that had little to do with local identity and artists, of whatever class, were turning away from depictions of Northumberland. It is important to note that there was still some interest in the locality and in

local or county identity, as shown by the visitor numbers to the Garvie, Horton and Slater, as well as the Hedley exhibitions and the presence of societies such as the Northumberland and Newcastle Society. Similarly, groups such as the Ashington Group have been mistaken for working-class advocates and as such as evidence of greater working-class consciousness. However, the group were in fact, before 1939, merely budding art students being given a traditional, but innovatively taught, course in art.

There are striking similarities between the situation in Northumberland before the 1880s and the 1930s which would undermine the case for growing homogenization as the cause of decline in local or county specificity in art. Firstly, the Northern Counties exhibitions were very similar to those of the Arts Association in the 1870s, favouring, as they did non-local scenes and, wherever possible, artists of standing in the capital. Secondly, it was due solely to the efforts of William Bell Scott and William Cosens Way at the School of Art that the students were given any exposure to important depictions of Northumberland, as it was not written into the syllabus. Thirdly, the emphasis on non-local art and the low prices asked for local depictions at the Laing Art Gallery have their antecedents in the art theories expounded in the Northumberland newspapers of the 1820s and 1830s, which held that art had to be universal to be of any merit and so local art was effectively not art. Fourthly, the role of artists as arbiters of public taste returned to the traditional place of the art class room and their power in this regard was further diluted by their diversification into areas of design and commercial art. The status of the 1820s and 1830s had therefore been restored some 100 years later. The story of art in Northumberland in the 1930s is not so much about nationalization and modernity as a return to an older, conservative status quo.

Conclusion

Much of the historiography concludes that cultural appreciation was determined by class identity. This appreciation was supposedly used to spread morality amongst the working class and to facilitate a civic aggrandisement which signalled cultural superiority to surrounding cities. Furthermore, an associated argument posits that as technology and transport became more sophisticated, Britain became more culturally homogenized along class lines. The character of the newly 'nationalized' middle classes was supposedly informed by the growing dominance of those in the south east, which stripped the northern provincial towns of most of their prestige. This dominance supposedly shaped the character of 'Englishness' and shrunk the space for representative English sites to the Home Counties. Between the beginning of the twentieth century and the 1930s the elite 'exodus' from provincial cities and the move towards middle-class suburbanization apparently strengthened this shift. Furthermore, cultural nationalization was supposedly strengthened by the increased role of the state, which broadened its social and educational remit, which led not only to cultural nationalization but centralization.

This historiography creates the impression that in the early Victorian period cities and provinces were relatively culturally independent and indeed, fiercely jealous of this independence. However, as the state assumed more social responsibility some of this political and indeed cultural independence waned, despite a continued distrust of central agencies. During the rest of the nineteenth century the culture of the provincial cities became more interlinked, a trend which continued throughout the period, aided by centrally-run educational establishments, initiatives and government schemes. It also creates the impression that in the Victorian period at least art appreciation was mostly a middle-class concern and it was increasingly used in the nineteenth century to display power and authority. Therefore, not only were exhibition organizers and patrons expressing a class identity through their associations with art, but also artists themselves were concerned, to a greater or lesser extent, with the perpetuation of these ideals because of the need to satisfy the market. All of this combined to produce a golden age of civic culture and the competition between provincial, especially northern, cities to assume cultural dominance. Crucially

however, this is not seen as a sign of these cities' cultural independence but as a manifestation of middle-class cultural hegemony and homogenization.

According to the historiography there was also a trend towards an appreciation of 'Englishness' or 'Britishness' which emerged from colonies such as Newlyn and sold on the metropolitan art market. Indeed, this preoccupation supposedly grew and the heyday of the search for a national identity came in the 1920s and 1930s, partly as a backlash to Continental culture. The impression one has of the end of the period is that not only was art becoming more 'democratic' but that culture itself was more homogenized. Cultural appreciation still appealed but it was no longer used to bolster civic pride but to show individual sophistication through appreciation of metropolitan trends.

There are obvious and substantial merits to many of these arguments. For example, growing state intervention and the standardization of education evidently helped to produce a more nationally standardized culture. Similarly, class did have some role to play in at least setting the limits of taste in an individual or group. Furthermore, in many areas there was an obvious shift away from the provincial city by its elites and middle class. Nevertheless, the standard model of cultural change does need modification. In Northumberland state intervention perversely led to a greater cultural independence in the 1880s and 1890s which is indicative of the fact that the effects of state intervention were mainly, but not consistently, in one direction. Furthermore, art appreciation and production was often not class but county based. In its heyday local artists were producing art which concerned the county and showed the social differences between the county and other British areas. Indeed, this was feasible because there was a strong local art market, comprising wealthy patrons who mixed local and metropolitan art in their collections and more modest clients who bought smaller local paintings and prints.

The outcome of the emphasis on growing state intervention and the 'rise of the middle class' is an assumption that any independent county or civic culture was stronger in the 1820s and 1830s than in the 1880s and 1890s. Furthermore, any evidence of independent culture in the later century is taken as a mere manifestation of civic pride. However, this is clearly and emphatically not the case in Northumberland. The

earlier period was one of integration with the artistic standards of London and other provincial cities. There was a strong strand of opinion that favoured first-rate metropolitan works and believed that local art was a contradiction in terms. At the same time, artists were producing Romantic and Picturesque works which fitted a metropolitan standard. Conversely, by the end of the nineteenth century, localist sentiment amongst artists was at its height and this was not the by-product of civic pride. Artists concentrated on depicting the whole county, civic, rural and coastal and importantly these depictions were for the local market. There is no reason to suggest therefore that cultural homogenization worked as inexorably as the historiography suggests. Therefore, although by the 1930s this artistic independence had ended, it is not necessary to attribute the cause of this to a nationalization of culture. Indeed, more prosaically it seems likely that this was a return to the older status quo, due in part to the death of many artists interested in county identity. The death of these artists and their cultural ideals was likely, in any circumstances, to lessen the importance of the localist agenda. The effects of cultural nationalization and standardization of teaching may have given Northumberland artists their character in the 1930s, but it was not the cause of the decline in artistic county or local identity.

The two most important deficiencies in the current historiography are the emphasis on the inexorable and one-way effects of state intervention and the assumed pre-eminence of class as a cultural determiner. In the case of state and central intervention the difficulty is one of viewpoint. Just as historians have explained the rise of 'Englishness' with reference only to the Royal Academy exhibitions, there is often an undue focus on the central workings of initiatives such as the Government Schools of Design as well as non-governmental organizations such as Mass Observation. The view from the ground of such operations is often rather different and exposes not only the limits of central power but the ability of local conditions to shape the character of these initiatives.

The uses of class as an explanatory tool in domestic Victorian history is ubiquitous, to the point where other identities, such as gender identity, often do not challenge this pre-eminence, but rather seek to complement it. Indeed, even studies of local and regional cultural vibrancy are couched in class terms. However, the evidence from this thesis suggests that one does not need to make recourse to class theory to

explain cultural localism, the preoccupations of this localism are self-evident and county identity was something which was shared across classes.

The Internal Dynamics of the Northumberland Culture

The historiography underplays the significance of the local dynamic and by seeing an increasingly important role for the state and the metropolis it creates self-fulfilling prophecies. This is particularly perverse given the supposed political and cultural power of the Victorian city and its elites. However, even though this is acknowledged most historians of northern cities seek to explain their development in almost exclusively the universal terms of class and the appropriation of London-centric culture. This is why Laura Newton and Paul Quinn's explanation of the artistic culture of Northumberland is flawed. Whilst both concede a 'regionalist' agenda they nevertheless never allow the county or the region to have an historical dynamic of its own and they associate the changes in Northumberland to shifts in class, state and national culture. However, this study has shown that the locality, especially in the form of the county, *did* have its own internal historical dynamic. This dynamic did not mean that it was inured to country-wide changes or nation-wide social dynamics, but that its internal history *could be itself an agent of change and a source of identity*. Therefore, state involvement was appropriated to bolster local and county pride and middle-class identity played a secondary role to county identity amongst artists.

The dynamics of class, cultural homogenization and centralization do not, on their own, explain the experience of Northumberland. An appreciation of the changes in the public role and status of the artist make the situation in Northumberland clearer. Although such changes were evident across the country, their particular trajectory was unique to the county. Therefore, the 1820s and 1830s saw the attempts of Thomas Miles Richardson and Henry Perlee Parker to affirm the public authority of artists. However, nationally, artists had not yet been recognised as independent cultural agents and Richardson and Parker's attempts were decried as self-serving. The Newcastle Institution for the General Promotion of the Fine Arts, which replaced the institutions of Richardson and Parker, were run by art patrons who considered themselves better equipped for the role because they were potential buyers. Richardson and Parker's first attempt to promote artists as arbiters of public taste had therefore failed. Furthermore, there was no

disagreement between patrons and artists over what 'taste' was to be promoted. 'Local art' which was distinctive in style or theme by locality, was not considered as 'art' by patrons and artists alike, except in the case of those were considered 'natural geniuses', such as Thomas Bewick. Therefore, the artists of the 1820s and 1830s produced Romantic and Picturesque land and seascape paintings which were ostensibly of local scenes but conformed to accepted national standards.

Local artists only became confident of their role with the professional training afforded to them by the Government School of Art. This school had obviously been intended as a practical training ground for designers employed in industry but in Newcastle, at least, it concentrated on fine-art teaching. Furthermore, through the efforts of William Bell Scott and William Cosens Way the school fostered appreciation and celebration of Northumberland identity. Therefore, as the pupils of the 1840s-1860s became the celebrated artists of the late 1870s, the 1880s and the 1890s, they were both secure in their professional status and aware of the artistic and cultural heritage of the county.

This new found confidence translated into artists' willingness to challenge the role of patrons and artistic elites in the 1870s. Through letters to the press these artists called into question the ability of the artistic elites to be public arbiters of taste in artistic matters. Meanwhile the artistic elites that ran the Arts Association created traditional exhibitions which favoured oil paintings from London artists and the work of Old Masters. Not only did local artists question the elite's ability to present aesthetic worth to the public, unlike in the earlier period, it also disagreed as to the nature of artistic value. The artists therefore bemoaned the lack of local works on show. Doubtless this was partly for financial reasons, but the logic they applied to their case is noteworthy. They deemed the cause of supporting local artists as a worthy pursuit in itself and they accused the elite of the same charges of favouritism and unsuitability that had been levelled at Richardson and Parker.

This group of confident artists dominated the Northumberland scene in the 1880s and 1890s after the Arts Association was bankrupted. In an effort to safeguard *local* artists' *professional* welfare they established the Bewick and other clubs and artists' recreational needs were served by the Pen and Palette Club, which

was dominated by artists in its early years. Clubs like the Bewick also established a long-running series of exhibitions which rectified some of the problems of the Arts Association era. The local art that was on display at these exhibitions was aimed at a thriving local art market and celebrated Northumberland's culture as well as the differences between the county and the rest of Britain and placed didactic social messages against a local backdrop. Although the exhibitions did include contributions from other areas of the country, it was nevertheless dominated by local scenes and the work of local artists and when the club ran into financial difficulties it debarred contributions from all but its members.

The early years of the twentieth century saw a decline in the artists' agenda, including their focus on the locality and the county. A large proportion of this was due to the death of many of the men who had been educated at the School of Design in Newcastle between the 1840s and the 1860s. However, there was also resurgence in the artistic elite's agenda, in the form of the Laing Art Gallery, which was funded and run by the artistic elite, with minimal intervention from artists, the middle class and the council. The gallery favoured the same type of metropolitan-focused taste as the Arts Association and concentrated on acquiring and exhibiting work that was of 'national importance'. The gallery had the annual Northern Counties Exhibition, which was very well attended and showed the continuing popularity of local art. However, the exhibition was treated as a money-making venture and given a low priority in the Gallery's committee minutes. Furthermore, the work that was accepted for display at the exhibitions became increasingly cheap and it quickly diversified into the display and sale of crafts items, such as jewellery. Therefore, not only was important local art not being produced as regularly it was also not being displayed as often.

By the 1930s Northumberland's art world had been stripped of most of its local and county identity. The Laing Art Gallery made some attempts to promote the work of local artists but its annual exhibitions of local work continued in the same vein and artists were now being displayed with only a tenuous link to the northern counties. Furthermore, local artists who were trained at Armstrong College were not given an appreciation of local art traditions nor county history. Their traditional lessons unsurprisingly produced artists who looked to the metropolis and the Continent for their ideas and work places. Also, the college trained artists to look beyond painting to other forms of expression and livelihood, such as advertising and

teaching. The role of local artist as public arbiter had passed in Northumberland. Arguably, this is shown in the reception of the Ashington Group. This group were interested in being trained as individualist amateur artists and were instead shown to the rest of the country as 'proletarian painters' through the work of Mass Observation, a metropolitan-led group. Such mistakes had been made with relation to the work of William Bell Scott, but these had, at least, been remedied in the county by those artists who saw his work as an expression of county identity and not industrialism. This was not the case with the Pitmen Painters who were as unknown in Northumberland as in the rest of the country in the 1930s.

The 1830s and the 1930s were similar in terms of Northumberland's art scene. The art of both decades was dominated by artistic elites in the arena of exhibition and education. Artists meanwhile, were interested in metropolitan trends and had little appreciation for their county or locality. Furthermore, just as artists had little professional status in the 1830s, by the 1930s this was being diluted by their diversification away from full-time painting.

There was obviously a correlation between the rise of the professional artist and the artistic celebration of Northumberland. This is due to the artistic education of the late-nineteenth century generation and the fact that Northumberland artists predominantly supplied a local market. Therefore, a celebration of county identity was both desirable and feasible. This goes some way to explaining the similar developments in other northern areas in the period.

The Experience of Other Counties and Localities

Although more systematic research would need to be undertaken in order to establish the patterns in the artistic life of other areas in Britain, there is some evidence from the secondary literature that there are similarities between the situation in Northumberland and those elsewhere. For example, the nineteenth-century art scene in Sheffield and Hallamshire bears striking similarities to that of Northumberland. 'Before the middle of the nineteenth century', Clive Binfield argues, 'comparatively few of the portraits and landscapes found in the collections assembled by well-to-do people [in the district] were the work of

Hallamshire artists'.¹ According to some of the secondary literature it was only in the 1840s that the situation began to change with the opening of the Sheffield Government School of Design in 1843. Some of the agitation for the school had come from Henry Perlee Parker who had moved to Sheffield from Newcastle after being appointed Drawing Master at Wesley College in 1841. According to Quentin Bell 'probably Sheffield attempted to give academic instruction',² and by 1845, when Young Mitchell became the headmaster the school supposedly 'wished to encourage art appreciation ... [and] address [the school] to more ambitious schemes of general art education'.³ By 1874 the Sheffield Society of Artists had been founded because:

not all artists could afford the cost of sending framed canvases to galleries in London, Birmingham or Liverpool. What was needed was an organization in Sheffield itself which could bring together work by painters and sculptors from the area under conditions likely to create an atmosphere of co-operative effort.⁴

Just as in Northumberland the Sheffield society was established for the benefit of local artists. It held two exhibitions a year and one was exclusively for these artists to exhibit. The aim was to 'break the monopoly of London as the art capital of England'.⁵ Towards the end of the nineteenth century more art clubs opened in the area, including The Sheffield and District Art Club, which opened in 1884, the Surrey Art Club which opened in 1890 on Surrey Street and the Heeley Art Club which was an amateur organization, formed because its members believed the Sheffield Society of Artists 'was too anxious to serve the pecuniary interests of the its professional members'.⁶ Interestingly, in a fate similar to that of Northumberland's art clubs, which ceased to exist after the Laing was founded, the Sheffield Society of Artists continued until after the Second World War when 'the advent of open art exhibitions presented a

¹ Clive Binfield, ... [et al.], *The History of the City of Sheffield 1848-1993 Volume II: Society* (Sheffield, 1993), p. 443.

² Quentin Bell, *Schools of Design* (London, 1963), p. 134.

³ Binfield, *The History of the City of Sheffield*, p. 445.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 449.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 450.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 451.

timely alternative to [their] annual function'.⁷ Indeed, the decline in the localist art scene began later in Sheffield than in Northumberland, possibly for this reason. Two new art societies emerged in the 1920s and early 1930s- The Sheffield League of Arts opened in 1924 and The Sheffield Arts Club opened in 1932. However, after the Graves Gallery opened in 1934, financed by the businessman John George Graves, 'the encouragement of art ... [was] no longer the provenance merely of a limited number of societies'.⁸

At least some of the local artists involved in this club were interested in painting the local area. For example, James Poole (n.d.) painted many views of the areas surrounding Sheffield and although he was popular in Manchester and London many of his commissions came from the Sheffield-born pen manufacturer James Gillott (b.1866).

There is also plenty of evidence to suggest that local and county identity flourished elsewhere in the nineteenth century and stayed strong until at least the inter-war period. Furthermore, this local identity was independent of civic pride and could be felt by the working and the middle classes. John Belchem talks of the 'Manx Renaissance' of the 1890s. He argues that it was a 'cultural' rather than a 'political' movement, with no wish for home rule.⁹ Importantly, one of the main agents in this, the Manx Language Society, was an offshoot of the Isle of Man Fine Arts Guild, which had undertaken the 'admirable work of encouraging Manx industry, music and art'.¹⁰ Unlike in the case of Northumberland however, Manx cultural nationalism was prompted, at least according to Belchem, by its thriving tourism industry. The influx of largely working-class tourists from the North West led some residents into 'agonizing over its ethno-cultural dangers'.¹¹ Although most of the tourists were working class and some associated with the renaissance hoped to attract more middle-class tourists, this was because such nationalists believed that these tourists would be more reverent of Manx culture.

⁷ *Idem.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 453.

⁹ Neville Kirk, *Northern Identities: Historical Interpretations of the 'North' and 'Northemess'* (Aldershot, 2000), p. 78.

¹⁰ *Mannin 2* (May 1914), quoted in Kirk, *Northern Identities*, p. 78.

¹¹ Kirk, *Northern Identities*, p. 78.

Similarly, in the 1930s, the presence of the *Heaton Review*, between 1927 and 1934, shows the strength of localist sentiment in inter-war Yorkshire. The magazine began as the parish magazine of St Barnabas Church in Heaton, but soon became a magazine devoted to arts and literature, which, whilst inviting articles from internationally famous names such as George Bernard Shaw and John Galsworthy, its focus was on the culture of local life. As Russell notes 'interest in and affection for the locality and its topography, history and cultural affairs was highly apparent; in 1928, for example, seven of its 25 articles were devoted to some aspect of local life in Heaton'.¹² What is most interesting about this case is that all of those involved with the publication of the magazine were 'middle-middle class' and it was targeted at a middle-class audience.¹³

As with the Sheffield Society of Artists, one of the main purposes of the publication was to 'address ... the relationship between the national, London-centred culture and the regional periphery'.¹⁴ Although Russell maintains that the 'magazine offered a vehicle for resisting ... the loss of the rural and of the historic', therefore placing the magazine also within the historiographical context of English resistance to the concept of modernity, he nevertheless concludes that 'the most distinctive and important aspect of [the magazine's] voice was its powerful local and regional tone'.¹⁵ Indeed, he notes 'it was in [the] context of a concerned, almost militant, regionalism that the *Heaton Review* operated'.¹⁶ Furthermore, Russell concludes that: 'the emergence of an increasingly recognizable national middle class ... should not obscure the fact that many individuals ... were still greatly concerned about the balance between the local/regional and the metropolitan ... the growth of a national middle class, far from encouraging a diminution of provincial-metropolitan tensions, may well have fuelled them'.¹⁷

There was a large role for pictorial artists in the *Heaton Review*. George Green Hopkinson, editor of the magazine from 1929, was particularly interested in painting. He was an amateur artist, a photographer, a

¹² Dave Russell, 'The Heaton Review, 1927-1934: Culture, Class and a Sense of Place in Inter-War Yorkshire', *Twentieth Century British History*, 17 (2006), p. 328.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 326.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 325.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 332.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 337. The evidence that Russell gives for such 'regionalism' is limited to expressions of Yorkshire identity, and so may more properly be called 'county sentiment'.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 336.

collector and a member of the Bradford Arts Club. Russell notes that 'fine art appears to have been his greatest passion'.¹⁸ This passion seems to have spilt over into his work for the magazine, which saw the number of full-plate artwork, per edition, rise from three to fifteen during his time as editor.¹⁹ These reproductions included the works of Philip Naviasky (1894-1983) who was educated at Leeds School of Fine Art and who was most noted for his paintings of the Yorkshire Dales. The magazines also included a reproduction of *Bainbridge, Wensleydale* (n.d.) by Roland Vivian Pitchforth (1895-1962) who was born in Yorkshire and trained at Leeds College of Art and the Royal College of Art. Paintings of the Dales were also reproduced from work by Raymond Coxon (1896-1997) and his wife Edna Ginesi (1902-2000), born in Leeds, who were both educated at Leeds School of Art. Fred Lawson (1888-1968) was the artist whose work most often featured in the *Heaton Review* and most editions included his pen-and-ink drawings of local scenes. Lawson was based in Wensleydale.

The early history of art in Yorkshire also bears a resemblance to the situation in Northumberland. If the work of those artists featured in the *Heaton Review* helped mark a high point in the expression of county identity, then the scene at the beginning of the nineteenth century was very different and art exhibitions were reflective of London trends and a reverence for the Old Masters. The Northern Society for the Encouragement of the Fine Arts in Leeds held exhibitions between 1809-1811 and 1822-1830. Although these exhibitions were organized not by artists but by a group of art patrons, the paintings on display were similar to those which were viewed in Newcastle. As R.J. Morris notes: 'The pictures on show were mainly landscapes and portraits, with some animal paintings and religious themes ... when the exhibitions revived in the 1820s they included 'Ancient Masters', thus serving the wider interests of collectors and visitors as well as those of the artists'.²⁰ As was the case with the art societies in Newcastle during the period, most of the artists displayed were based in London. For example, at the 1810 exhibitions, 26 London-based artists exhibited 78 paintings. There were six Leeds artists displaying 29 pictures.²¹

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 330.

¹⁹ Idem.

²⁰ R.J. Morris, 'Middle-Class Culture, 1700-1914' in Derek Fraser (ed.), *A History of Modern Leeds* (Manchester, 1980), p. 19.

²¹ Idem.

The art world of each different area is, of course, to some extent a product of internal factors and so there are differences in the trajectories of different areas. For example, the localist agenda in art reached a high point in Yorkshire in the 1930s, before going into decline, whereas the zenith for the cultural appreciation of Manx identity occurred in the 1890s. What it is important to note however is that there are common elements in the history of many northern areas. For many of these areas a localist identity complemented or challenged the notion of 'Englishness', was not eroded by nationalization of culture or class homogenization nor confined to civic identity as another expression of class identity.

A much broader study of northern areas is needed to fully establish the movements and connections between the rise of the professional local artist and the fortunes of localist sentiment. If localities had their own independent dynamics then one would expect to see some areas of difference, especially in timing, but also some similarities due to the potential importance of the locality as a source of independent artistic identity. Although it is beyond the scope of this study to attempt a definitive explanation of these linkages, such a study would be important for two reasons. Firstly, the study of the development of professional artists has been slim, beyond the work of historians such as Trevor Fawcett and Greg Smith and the implications of the types of artistic training in this early period in the provinces has been ignored.

Secondly, and more importantly, such a study would redress the historiographical balance. Studies of class and culture tend to derive, at least partly, from the theoretical writings of philosophers such as Bourdieu and Foucault and therefore often take as a given the quasi-Marxist notion of 'cultural capital' and social control through culture. Such readings will be, by definition, unable to take into account any evidence either of localist culture or cross-class culture. Such an approach can be seen most obviously in the works of Caroline Arscott and Dianne Macleod, although its influence is seen in much of historiography. The study of cultural nationalization tends towards a similar blindness of localist culture, because of its necessarily top-down approach. Therefore, the otherwise invaluable work by Quentin Bell dedicates relatively little space to the running of the provincial Schools of Design, the *raison d'être* of the scheme, and even then it can be limited to relations between the branch and central schools.

Significance of the Study

This study is important for four reasons. Firstly, it goes some way to exploring the public role of the artist, in a period of transition for the profession. That it does so from the perspective of the local artist means that the study has concentrated on the experience of the majority of painters, who worked outside of the capital and who gained little national recognition. Despite the fact that they remained the majority in their profession the development of this group has been neglected in the historiography, especially in studies concerned with delineating patterns over a long time period. Researching the work of local artists is also important as it sheds light on the changing nature of culture itself, particularly the shifting rhetorical use of the concepts of 'local culture' and 'local art', between a derogatory, even ironic term and a statement of pride and identity.

Secondly, beyond the specifics of the subject matter, the study has also shown that the traditional emphasis on homogenization, both in terms of class behaviour and standardized institutions needs modification. One certainly does not wish to argue for an exclusion of class as an explanatory term. Yet, in the case of cultural appreciation the idea that it was class which predominantly determined one's response to culture needs a caveat. One's class position may have bestowed a certain cultural and aesthetic 'habitus', but class consciousness was often not a deciding factor in cultural choices. An appreciation of local or county culture was often such a motivator and therefore the nationalization of the middle class did not lead to the downfall of localist sentiment. In Northumberland at least, the retreat of localist art culture was a return to the status quo brought about by county-specific factors surrounding the art world. The thesis has also shown that the growth of such a nationalized culture, when seen from the local view, was not as complete, nor was it 'inevitable' as the historiography suggests. Indeed, to a certain degree the process could facilitate a greater localism through nationally-standardized institutions and, as was the case according to Dave Russell, in the case of Yorkshire, it could create a localist backlash.

Dave Russell notes that 'the British middle class might appear much more geographically united when looked at from a national perspective, and may, in many objective senses have been so. Angle and place of

vision is all important, however. At micro-level, and inside many heads, the case is far less clear'.²² The same can be said for many of the historiographical areas examined in this study. Indeed, this is the third point the thesis emphasizes. Typical of the top-down approach is the treatment of the Schools of Design and Mass Observation's influence on the appreciation of the Ashington Group's work. Many studies argue from a metropolitan viewpoint or try to create an overview of vast areas, which leads to misunderstanding and oversimplification of local realities. This, of course, has important implications, not only for local history but for the appreciation of national culture as a whole.

Fourthly and most importantly, this study has demonstrated that the workings of local or county culture were not always determined by that area's relationships with outside forces. Its own internal conditions and personnel often had a larger role than is appreciated. Local and sub-national areas, whether they be county, region or city, had a semi-independent internal historical dynamic of their own. Local culture was an independent agent of change.

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