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Introduction: art in the first industrial society

The 1857 Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition was a landmark in British cultural life.[1] It marked the emergence of the industrialist and merchant as a key force in the patronage of British art in the same way that the 1832 Reform Act heralded the arrival of that same social class in British politics.[2] The exhibition was organised by a largely middle-class network of patrons, and many of the most celebrated exhibits came from the homes of those who had made their wealth through trade, finance and industrial production (see Figure 1).[3] Yet while studies have been undertaken on the great private collections of these industrial and commercial leaders, less systematic attention has been paid to the contribution they made to the formation of the art institutions that grew up alongside this extensive pattern of private collecting.[4] Where urban art institutions have received attention, interest has often been focused on capital cities, with one influential essay all but ignoring regional institutions.[5] Where art historians have taken an interest in the English regions, the focus has often been on the role of voluntary bodies and local corporations as the sponsors of individual artistic projects, such as the famous Ford Madox Brown murals at Manchester's town hall, with less attention paid to the emergence of art institutions and the role they played in the wider cultural economy of industrial centres.[6] Waterfield's recent national survey was an important landmark but it suffers from a London-centric perspective, contrasting London to what are described as the 'provinces' while offering little on the smaller towns, the dynamics of urban processes or questions of regionality.[7] Hill has made important contributions to our understanding of the class dimensions of late nineteenth-century city art museums, while Woodson-Boulton has highlighted the influence of Ruskinian agendas on major municipal art galleries.[8] The present study takes a broader perspective, informed by a detailed understanding of the nature of industrial Britain. Rather than

1 Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition: the Main Exhibition Hall at Trafford Park

seeing art institutions as primarily a late Victorian phenomenon, this book seeks to explore their development from their origins in the late eighteenth century. In particular, it will reject the view that one particular set of cultural ideas ever came to dominate the public art movement. By focusing on the world's 'first industrial region', the county of Lancashire and its hinterland, it is possible to develop a more thorough understanding of the roots of these institutions, the new urban elites that created them and the different values that they promoted and celebrated. This detailed regional approach will allow for an understanding of the complex cultural politics surrounding art institutions, the ways in which they were used as a platform for a range of social reform agendas and the reasons why their role came to be questioned in the early twentieth century. This volume will explore art institutions as key elements of the urban public sphere, as agents for social inclusion and, eventually, as cultural democratisation. Although managed largely by a small segment of the urban middle class, art institutions could exercise influence only if they were public bodies, promoting a public purpose. By the 1850s this meant advancing the interests of all classes, through the spread of cultural knowledge and visual literacy. Sometimes this was to be done for narrow instrumental purposes; sometimes

a 'higher' objective was postulated. Sometimes this was primarily to serve the civic community, sometimes to advance the self-improving aspirations of the individual.

This is a study of institutions, networks and decisions as much as of art production and display. Understanding how institutions evolved in response to the changing society around them is the focus of this work. The ecological concentrations of population, urbanisation and capital surpluses created by proto-industrialisation were important preconditions for the evolution of cultural institutions, but they do not in themselves provide a sufficiently powerful explanation for why particular types of institutions emerged.[9] Although middle-class cultural leaders promoted a vision of cultural life that reflected bourgeois and largely liberal values, there was, in practice, a great deal of disagreement about the function and role of art institutions. Sometimes this could reflect the political fissures in the urban middle class.[10] However, the disagreement could reflect more profound differences about the type of cultural education that was required in the modern liberal state, the quality or otherwise of modern British art or the role of modern capitalism in facilitating or undermining cultural production. By the time Edwardian Lancashire had inherited vast public collections of Victorian art, it had begun to question the cultural insularity that had inspired them and even the cultural value of the art galleries in which they were housed.

The growing wealth of Lancashire in the late eighteenth century is the starting point for this study. The early part of the book explores the processes through which private capital was converted into social and public institutions, often building on pre-existing urban networks. Adopting a regional perspective offers a number of advantages over approaches that focus on the locality or nation, especially when one is attempting to assess processes of long-term historical transformation. Most importantly, it provides a useful strategic perspective for understanding how a variety of cultural and geographical identities can be expressed through artistic patronage and production. Gunn has shown how the specificities of locality and region could be expressed by newly emergent cultural practice and how cultural performances reshaped those identities.[11] Although London institutions exercised a powerful influence over the national art market, regional art activity, particularly that in Lancashire, did much to shape the taste for modern British paintings – a trend well established by the early Victorian period. Perhaps the most influential British art trader of all, Thomas Agnew and Sons, began business in Lancashire and continued to have

strong associations with Liverpool and Manchester throughout the nineteenth century. The advice of Agnews was to shape private collections across Britain and was very influential in the formation of the major municipal art galleries in Manchester, Salford, Liverpool and other towns of the region.[12]

A regional perspective, then, allows for a deeper analysis of the landscape of cultural formations. Since Langton's influential article on the emergence of regional cultures, historians have begun to see industrialisation as a factor in the formation and reformation of distinctive cultural outlooks.[13] This approach does not deny the importance of national narratives and agendas or the significance of individual taste and personal influences. However, it shows how sub-national cultural communities are formed and helps us to understand how those communities are sustained, whether that be through personal friendships, commercial inter-urban networks, civic projects or new cultural institutions such as art galleries and schools. As this study will illustrate, the growth in support for modern British art, often seen as a 'national' movement, was frequently driven by regional art markets and regional art institutions in industrial towns far distant from London. Much of the expansion of this market was due to the surpluses created by industry, with a rising middle class eschewing many of the artistic canons celebrated by the aristocracy for new cultural forms appropriate to their own interests and identities. It was profits from regional industry that allowed for the formation of a genuinely national market, creating new opportunities not only for collectors but also for artists who could often exploit civic and regional networks and loyalties to establish remunerative careers. These loyalties were complex and often overlapped, sometimes stretching overseas. Lancashire was the first industrial region and a key hub in a global economic network. Its worldwide commercial networks eventually provided new international dimensions to its regional identity and, unsurprisingly, its cultural life.[14]

While the networks of collectors stretched across the world, civic and regional networks provided the immediate framework for a stable and predictable art market. Early nineteenth-century collectors such as William Roscoe, William Hardman, Henry McConnel and Thomas Agnew often drew upon their local civic networks among the emerging middle-class citizenry to institutionalise the practices of art collecting and appreciation within the region and their own cities. Art museums, galleries, academies and schools were the mechanisms for bringing new cultural groupings together, establishing practices of cultural display and exchange and, ultimately, forging new artistic canons and approaches. It was through these institutions that the cultural politics of the new middle

class were fought out, as competing elements sought to institutionalise their own practices through public display and validation. While these organisations often began as private societies or clubs, by the end of the century many had received official recognition, either by being absorbed by the local state or by becoming the recipients of official, and sometimes royal, patronage. Therefore this book will explore how private activity and private networks came together in institutional forms. It will examine the political relationships inherent in the development of institutional art, the power of institutional culture and the tensions between different, sometimes competing, institutional models.

While almost all cultural actors saw the institutionalisation of art as a public good, there was frequent disagreement about the objectives of such institutions – disagreement that became, if anything, more intense as cultural critics accused art institutions of 'failing' to meet the educative and intellectual agendas of wider society. Conservative critics questioned the utility of art as a specifically 'public' commodity as independently minded artists, collectors and social theorists refused to subsume their activities within dominant civic, regional and national agendas. Radical critics, meanwhile, accused artists and collectors of becoming subservient to oppressive national, institutional and commercial norms. By the end of the nineteenth century the city and the region were seen as key artistic communities, but for different reasons. For some, they were promulgators of distinctive socially improving cultural forms, promoting civic virtue and guarding against anarchy; for others the region and the city were a refuge where independent schools could flourish free from the authority of the dominant cultural institutions of the Royal Academy and the commercialism of the auction room.

This study will focus on Lancashire and towns in its immediate industrial hinterland, including Warrington and Stockport, that, while nominally in Cheshire, were closely integrated into Lancashire's industrial economy. This immediately raises the issue of whether Lancashire as a region possessed a cohesive identity. This is not a straightforward question. Regional stereotypes have influenced not only popular discourse but also academic historiography. Traditionally seen as the world's first industrial region, Lancashire has often been characterised as fostering a race of men 'independent, practical, rough, calculating and enterprising', with little interest in the genteel or liberal arts.[15] Charles Dickens's Thomas Gradgrind and Josiah Bounderby, unimaginative men obsessed with facts and unable to think creatively, became widely perceived as typical examples of Lancastrian industrialists.[16] Yet this is an unbalanced

characterisation. Lancashire represented the 'leading sector' of British industrialisation, with economic growth and productivity gains driven by creativity and innovation.[17] The county developed a vibrant cultural economy, played a central role in the revival of British contemporary art, created a network of art institutions and produced some of the most distinctive public buildings of the nineteenth century. By 1914, even relatively small industrial towns such as Bury, Oldham and Rochdale each had a public art gallery, an art school and a strong network of local painters. Around the region, public buildings manifested the taste and identity of the local citizenry. Manchester's Gothic town hall, Liverpool's neo-classical St George's Hall and Preston's Periclean temple of art, the Harris Art Gallery, all served as monuments to a governing class prepared to express their new-found wealth through the canons of visual culture.

Lancashire was the first industrial region, but it was not solely an industrial region. Although it had only a small landed aristocracy, there were some important landed estates in Lancashire's hinterland, especially around the county town of Chester, most notably those of the Grosvenor family. Some members of the rural gentry, such as John Fleming Leicester of Tabley House, had important connections with Lancashire's elite urban society and supported cultural institutions, such as the Royal Manchester Institution (RMI).[18] Even in Lancashire itself, a county often thought to be dominated by the cotton trade and its associated industries, a resident gentry remained both politically and culturally influential. Henry Blundell of Ince was an important supporter of the early Liverpool Academy, while his friend and fellow collector Charles Townley provided the collection that led to the foundation of the Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities at the British Museum.[19] Agriculture continued to dominate the economy of south Cheshire and north Lancashire until the twentieth century, and even the cotton districts were not as homogeneous as one might expect. The cotton industry was internally divided between those towns which specialised in spinning and those associated with weaving, and as the century progressed larger towns tended to focus on the distribution trades.[20] The cotton district itself was really limited to only a small part of the region, south-east Lancashire.[21] Manchester may have been 'Cottonopolis', but by the second half of the nineteenth century it was more a centre of trade, storage and distribution than of production. The region's largest city, at least in 1800, was Liverpool, a city that generated most of its wealth from sea-borne trade and commerce. The towns between Liverpool and Manchester, such as Warrington and Wigan, came to be associated with the chemical industry, while the north Lancashire centres

of Preston and Lancaster were the county's traditional administrative centres. There was no single primary economic centre but two economically dominant cities, Manchester and Liverpool. Although in some respects their economic functions were complementary, their rivalry grew as the nineteenth century progressed. The phrase 'Manchester men, Liverpool gentlemen' highlighted the popular perception that Manchester was the centre of industrial production, while Liverpool represented the gentrified commercial marketplace. In reality, the development of the railways ensured that Manchester would soon become an important marketplace itself, and the construction of the Manchester Ship Canal was a direct and audacious challenge to Liverpool's dominance of the sea-borne trade. It was a move that highlighted the increasingly bitter commercial rivalry between the two centres.[22]

If a shared sense of regional identity did exist, it tended to find its expression through the preservation of pre-urban forms of popular culture, the transmission of 'traditional' folk tales and different manifestations of the Lancashire dialect. The pioneering Liverpool collector Roscoe was well known for his broad Liverpudlian accent in metropolitan artistic circles and this formed an important component of his public persona.[23] The wide dissemination of the works of John Collier and Tim Bobbin in the eighteenth century suggests that there was a significant middle-class literary public who saw them as an important expression of their own identity.[24] Throughout the nineteenth century, the genre of Lancashire dialect writing continued to be influential.[25] Benjamin Brierley and Edwin Waugh were compared with Burns and Tennyson and often republished by middle-class sponsors.[26] Yet it is doubtful whether the dialect and folk tales of Lancashire ever became the basis of a firm and coherent cultural identity for the region. First, they tended to be rooted in an anti-urban localism of imagined village life that had only passing antiquarian relevance for the industrial worker.[27] Secondly, the most famous folk and dialect tales were associated with a particular part of Lancashire, the villages around Rochdale, where Tim Bobbin first collected his elements of local dialect.[28] In reality, Lancashire embraced a variety of linguistic traditions and, of course, even today Mancunian and Liverpudlian accents and dialect are widely divergent. As the nineteenth century passed processes of migration, most particularly the Irish diaspora, produced a cosmopolitan community in which linguistic uniformity was impossible to imagine as an element of regional cohesion.

The political fragmentation and ideological diversity of Lancashire also made it difficult for a distinctive sense of regional identity to emerge. The administration

of Lancashire county government was divided between the old county town of Lancaster, which housed the county assizes, and the port and gentry town of Preston, which had the benefit of a more geographically central location and was home to the duchy courts. Politically, the region's two major cities, Liverpool and Manchester, sat at the opposite points of the ideological spectrum.[29] Manchester was a bastion of liberalism; it led the way in the parliamentary reform movement and acted as the headquarters of free trade, through the activities of the Anti-Corn Law League.[30] Manchester local government was dominated by the Liberal party until the early 1880s, and in the Edwardian period the city became a strong supporter of progressive or social democratic Liberalism, through the work of C. P. Scott of the *Manchester Guardian*.[31] Liverpool, in contrast, developed a reputation for political conservatism. Its associations with the slave trade meant that many of its merchants were reluctant to support Abolition.[32] Large-scale Irish immigration caused widespread working-class hostility that manifested itself in the formation of a strong Orange movement, allied to the Conservative party.[33] For much of the nineteenth century, the political leaderships of the two cities sat in outright opposition, a rivalry that was to be enhanced by economic competition and mutual cultural emulation. Thus, while regional identity remained weak, civic identity tended to be articulated more widely.

Identification with the town or city was not, of course, simply a reflection of partisan competition, or even of the economic processes associated with mass urbanisation. It was often a process fostered by emerging political elites who saw the local urban centre as both their political power base and a platform for projecting their status within the region.[34] The enfranchisement of large towns and cities by the 1832 Reform Act and the creation of representative urban government following the 1835 Municipal Corporations Act not only shifted the basis of political power: it encouraged the citizenry to see the town or city as the primary unit of local political organisation. As urban government took more powers, building city halls, libraries, art galleries and public infrastructure, civic identity was increasingly expressed and legitimised through these very processes of public improvements.[35] The town and city, not the region, became the focus of local political authority and local identity. However, economic processes drew towns and cities together into wider inter-urban networks. Cultural links were important too, with networks of libraries, museums, art galleries and exhibitions creating distinctive communities of cultural interest. The very fact that Lancashire was not centred on any single urban centre may have fostered a greater willingness, on the part of cultural patrons and agents, to

visit neighbouring towns and cities, reciprocating social invitations and sharing innovations. The sense of region therefore lay more in its networks, public events and shared experience than in a focus on a single geographical location or place of authority.

Although it is difficult to locate a regional identity in geographical terms, the towns and cities of Lancashire undoubtedly enjoyed the common experience of rapid economic expansion that is traditionally described as industrial revolution.[36] This rapid economic expansion is clearly crucial in explaining the creation of so much cultural capital in the region. However, while many economists have traditionally sought supply-side explanations for the processes of industrial transformation, it is also important to explore the demand side of the economy if long-term cultural change is to be understood. The consumer revolution has been described as 'the necessary analogue to the industrial revolution', with demand for new goods coming not merely as a response to productivity savings, but as a result of increased propensity to consume.[37] This increased propensity was not merely a product of the general growth in disposable income, but rather a cultural change fostered by emulation and social competition and encouraged by the growth of the commercial media. It also exploited Romanticist notions of self-expression and self-realisation, providing consumption with an ethical dimension.[38] The purchase of luxury goods, including art and works of culture, allowed citizens to aspire to higher social and cultural status and, in this view, helped to make eighteenth-century urban society more open, increasing opportunities for social mobility. Of course, this now 'traditional' historical interpretation of the consumer revolution needs to be treated with some caution; Fine and Leopold are probably right to suggest that it both underestimates the levels of social inequality and overestimates the contribution of luxury goods to industrial transformation.[39] However, the growth of the luxury goods market, with its focus on creative material products, did have important implications for the nature of cultural life and associated social institutions. It was a consumer revolution predicated on visible, material, personal competition. Since Veblen, historians have seen consumption as an inherently public act, with material possessions gaining meaning through actions of social display.[40] In order to maximise the impact of this visual performance, much of the display of consumption took place in urban locations where influential social groups were ecologically concentrated: on promenades, in meeting rooms, during concerts or as part of associative public functions. Without the city, the public display of consumption – and culture – was difficult and its impact more limited.

The English 'urban renaissance' was the product of the broadening of the distribution of wealth and the desire for status in a rapidly changing social climate. Borsay is particularly emphatic in linking this consumer revolution with the development of the city and, in particular, the sophisticated public amenities where wealth could be put on display.[41] While some, notably McInnes, have suggested that the geographical distribution of this urban renaissance may have been more limited than Borsay suggests, there can be little doubt that those towns that exhibited the greatest expansion of the consumer economy were among those who developed the earliest public and cultural institutions.[42] Detailed empirical research would seem to indicate that it was indeed the urban middle classes who were the economic engines of this urban renaissance and not the traditional gentry.[43] Certainly, the expansion of urban public and cultural institutions in the mid-eighteenth century would suggest a considerable broadening in those who had sufficient disposable income and sufficient inclination to support activities associated with the public sphere. Innovations, such as the development of the provincial printing press, the newspaper and the subscription library, had become almost universal in major towns by the end of the century. An important part of this consumerist expansion of the public sphere was associated with the market for literature. The lapse of the restrictive Licensing Act of 1695 marked a period of rapid literary expansion. By 1760 around 150 newspapers had been established in over fifty towns.[44] The creation of a literary public served to form a public space of political and social engagement that went beyond the traditional ties of family, locality and kinship. In an era of a highly restricted urban franchise and limited organs of local administration, the press created a forum for public intercourse and debate. Above all, it gave citizens, in a world that was rapidly becoming urbanised, personal visibility to advertise not only their products, but also their common cultural interests.[45] Associations no longer needed to be left to personal introduction, the public meeting or chance, but could be forged through the agency of print. It is, then, unsurprising that so many of the pioneering art institutions, such as the Liverpool Academy and the RMI, used the print media to create visibility, credibility and legitimacy.

The urban renaissance fostered a range of new spaces where people gathered to conduct cultural business, and not all were elitist. Coffee dens, inns and alehouses were important social institutions for all classes. Even the gentry were happy to frequent the eighteenth-century alehouse. The Earl of Derby, for example, made the Albion Inn in Manchester his long-term residence during his annual visit to the city.[46] Magistrates were known to meet in inns, especially when formal

public buildings were unavailable locally.[47] However, by the end of the eighteenth century, there was an increasing tendency for larger urban centres to develop higher-class cultural facilities, often with restrictive access, that were aimed at an emerging elite element of the bourgeoisie. Some urban improvements, especially those associated with key infrastructure projects, were financed by public loans raised through local state-appointed Improvement Commissioners. Cultural institutions, however, were usually financed by a system of subscription or share ownership.[48] Improvement Commissioners rarely had powers to fund public buildings, and there were few opportunities to raise them through private credit. Private subscription associations were notoriously unstable and difficult to sustain, especially those without a distinct commercial function, such as art institutions.[49] Even the irascible William Roscoe in Liverpool encountered difficulties, and the modern Liverpool Academy succeeded only after several earlier manifestations collapsed through lack of sustained support.[50] There was little prospect, therefore, of banks providing substantial support to new cultural societies, and even in 1815 credit facilities were limited and restrictive.[51] Public institutions therefore depended on private patronage and subscription income to provide the necessary capital.[52]

Cultural institutions should be viewed as part of a consumer revolution that was closely associated with a new public sphere of display and emulation. Regions such as Lancashire, which became urbanised and industrialised most quickly, enjoyed particularly rapid growth of a consumerist public sphere. This broadening of consumer culture undermined some of the traditional tenets of visual authority. If a merchant of wealth could dress as well as a duke, he could obtain the same visual status. Similarly, if poorer classes could obtain cheap imitation fancy goods they could both aspire to, and undermine, the value of the consumer products of the middle class. A more open, consumer society allowed cultural goods to be obtained outside the usual processes of elite socialisation; access to financial resources was the only significant limitation.[53] Mass consumption threatened not only the status of certain luxury goods but also the aristocracy's claim to be the guardians of cultural wealth.[54] The mass copying of old masters, often for middle-class collectors, was to fundamentally devalue old master works and eventually led to a rise in the relative value of contemporary British art.[55] For some, the 'mass production' of artists in public art schools threatened the status of art itself. Consumerism and the creation of new social spaces changed the nature of group activity and socialisation to one that prized abstract liberal principles of inclusivity over traditional patterns of elite sociability. Habermas's

work on the public sphere has shown how rational and critical values often lay behind the establishment of group activity, providing an objectively legitimised public space of identity and discourse free from traditional forms of authority.[56] Ultimately, the creation of a more open, universal public sphere also created universal insecurities. The fear of the mass-produced 'commodity public' saw its most vivid expression in Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* in 1869, where culture was seen as the only defence against a commodified and debased mass 'anarchy'.[57]

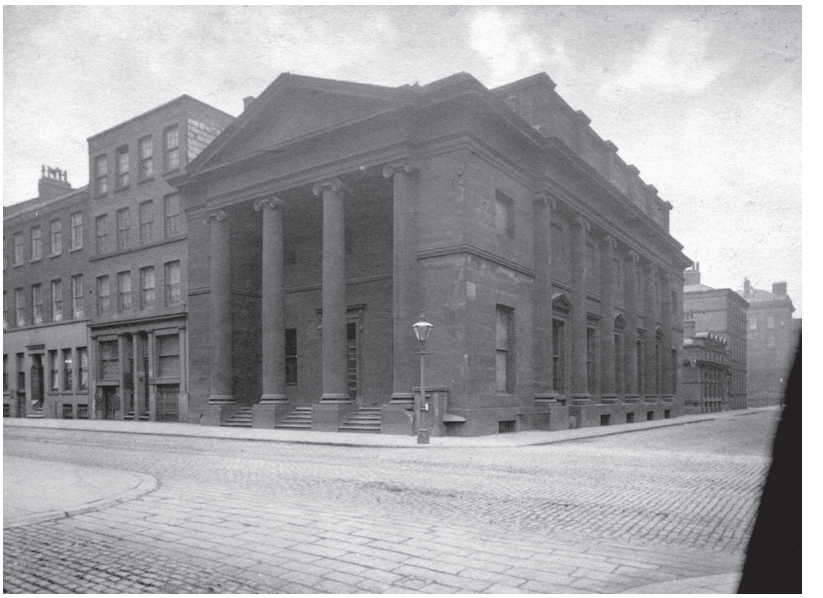
The emergence of a powerful cultural life in industrial towns, such as those in Lancashire, coincided with the rise of the middle class to urban political dominance. This has led some authors to see 'culture' as the outgrowth of an essentially materialist struggle. Bermingham, for example, has argued that culture emerged as an exclusive category to enshrine power, protect value and validate authority, the product of distinct phases of capitalist consumerism.[58] Bermingham's view of the history of culture clearly owes much to that of Bourdieu, who sees the notion of culture and taste as a way of both creating and maintaining social distinctions. This notion of culture, or more specifically 'high culture', is often associated with the capitalist desire to maintain the economic value of specific accumulated assets, such as picture collections. Art institutions often played an important role in this process of promoting specific schools and thus maintaining the value of particular collections. There are certainly early examples of cultural institutions adding to the reputations of particular artists and, consequently, the commercial value of their paintings.[59] However, this approach to studying culture is not necessarily useful in understanding the motivations for all cultural action, such as those inherent in the formation of civic art institutions. First, a civic institution was a collective effort which emphasised the production of an external, specifically public good – an exhibition, a lecture or a programme of education. Although cultural achievements often enhanced the social status of the leaders of the organising institution, the focus of that institution's work was the creation of an externality that would be beneficial to a much broader group of citizens. This was essential in providing the public justification for, and legitimisation of, art institutions. To limit the benefits of the externality too narrowly damaged both the reputation of the institution and its constituent membership. Therefore there was inherent tension between the supposed pressure for exclusivity and the absolute necessity for broader public validation.[60] Secondly, empirical evidence suggests that the semi-private and exclusive nature of art institutions was an embarrassment in an emerging liberal community obsessed by the public visibility and accountability of its leaders. The problems of the

late nineteenth-century Royal Academy demonstrate both the tension between commercial and academic pressures and the difficulty inherent in a semi-private body claiming national cultural authority.[61] Similar tendencies can be observed in Lancashire; it is notable that both the Liverpool Royal Institution (LRI) and the RMI eventually surrendered their private status and were brought under representative civic control. Finally, Bermingham's type of approach makes little reference to the specific intellectual problems with which cultural institutions attempted to engage, viewing their activities as an effort to sustain a subjective category (taste or culture) for the purpose of a subjective grouping (usually the middle class). This approach neglects the complex cultural preoccupations of the period and fails to engage with the ways in which these preoccupations themselves shaped the category of culture. In order to understand why cultural institutions are created, why they have such purchase and why they have so much prominence in the field of visual art, it is necessary to examine something of the broader intellectual trends of the eighteenth century and the tensions that lay within them.

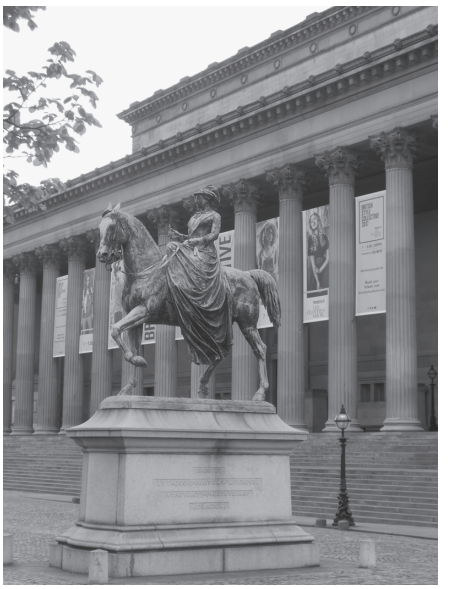
The power of 'culture' was in its ability to command wide public acknowledgment and recognition, or, in other words, to have a demonstrable social or civic purpose. Within public cultural activity, the notion of taste took on particular importance and was often used to mark out differential status.[62] In an era of uncertainty and instability, the notion of taste was gradually established to create a category of citizenry who had discriminatory ability.[63] Taste was associated with particular forms of social training that were traditionally limited to certain landed social classes. However, the growth of a consumer society broadened access to that training, such that by 1766 Oliver Goldsmith's *Vicar of Wakefield* was able to argue that it was 'in this middle order of mankind are generally to be found all the arts, wisdom and virtues of society'.[64] Some went beyond this, arguing that the traditional aristocracy lived an essentially debased, idle and uncultured life, cut off from the broader social intercourse and cosmopolitanism of the city. Cultural politics thus reflected the spatial politics of early nineteenth-century social conflict. The city of the urban middle class was increasingly seen as the centre of culture, taste and virtue. Taste was a quality to be cultivated, and it could be effectively cultivated only in the social environment of the city, where it would develop for the benefit of the wider community.[65]

This association between the city and the development of sophisticated cultural tastes reflects not only contemporary social debate, but also Renaissance and Enlightenment interpretations of the classical and Renaissance past,

when the arts were at their supposed zenith.[66] The whole notion of 'civility' was, of course, intimately tied to the city.[67] Ancient civilisations saw culture as unthinkable outside cities, and the term 'barbarian' was used to describe any foreigner unassociated with a city or recognised urban colony. Pausanias, writing in the second century AD, declined to describe a settlement as a city unless it possessed certain key cultural features, such as a theatre, an agora or public buildings.[68] In other words, cities were defined in terms of their function as cultural, as well as administrative or economic, centres. The great artistic civilisations of the past were associated with specific city states, and the models of Periclean Athens and Medici Florence were to appear repeatedly in debates about contemporary culture and taste. In Lancashire, Roscoe became famous for his historical writings on the Medici family and self-consciously saw his home city of Liverpool as a latter-day Florence.[69] Manchester's urban topography soon became littered with Florentine-style architecture, with modern cotton warehouses aping the appearance of their Renaissance predecessors. However, it was classical models that had the most widespread application and most enduring legacy. The RMI of Charles Barry is the best-known early 'neo-Grec' building in Lancashire, but it was only one instance of a more widespread attempt to transform the Manchester skyline. Nearby buildings, such as the Portico Library, reflect a similar preoccupation, as do early municipal buildings such as the city's original town hall.[70] William Fairbairn's attempt to reconstruct the entire city centre around Piccadilly Square was perhaps the most audacious attempt to impose a neo-classical vision on a modern city. Under Fairbairn's plan the whole central square would have been reconstructed into a grand classical gateway, with a new public university, baths, infirmary and columnar arcades.[71] Although this visionary classical reinterpretation of urban space never found enough financial support to be realised, Manchester's rival, Liverpool, did reconstruct much of its key urban core in a neo-classical style. The magnificent St George's Hall came to dominate the city's central square and was gradually joined by similar emulative classical buildings, including the public library, museum and Walker Art Gallery. Significantly, other major British industrial cities, such as Birmingham and Glasgow, adopted similar styles.[72] The enduring success of neo-classical, and particularly Greek, forms was reflective of the civic virtues associated with the ancient city.[73] Similar cultural reference points and values lay behind the construction of the Portico Library, Manchester, in 1808 (Figure 2), St George's Hall, Liverpool, in the 1850s (Figure 3) and the Harris Art Gallery, Preston, in the 1880s. In a world of consumerism and debased public taste,



2 The Portico Library in Manchester



3 St George's Hall in Liverpool

the Greeks offered objective standards with universal application. For men like Hibbert, the architect of the Harris Art Gallery, the 'Hellenic race' had reached the highest standard in taste and public culture. Only by emulating their genius could taste be purified and advanced.[74]

The appeal of the objective standard was obvious in a period of rapid change and uncertainty. It is significant that it was the middle classes that were most closely associated with the neo-classical urban form. Few major neo-classical urban buildings were erected through aristocratic patronage. Almost all were products of middle-class cultural associations or individual middle-class entrepreneurs. Some, such as Manchester's original town hall and Preston's Harris art gallery, were publicly sponsored by the units of middle-class local government. The replication of ancient forms of architecture in the modern city was not merely an attempt to establish objective forms of taste, or even to articulate the forms of a particular class. It was a product of a desire to create a new form of community, reflecting the civic humanism and virtue inherent in the great cities of the past. Liverpool and Manchester were aware of the great economic transformation around them and their own unprecedented growth. The challenge was to turn this economic capital into a product of lasting value: to promote a notion of collective virtue and taste that would secure the stability of the political community and provide the basis for its future development.[75]

The city of the proto-industrial age was characterised by rapid expansion but also by economic and political insecurity. While historians have traditionally viewed the eighteenth century as one of growing political stability, in practice this 'stability' tended to be limited to the rather stagnant Hanoverian party system. In reality, the latter half of the 'long eighteenth century' was punctuated by what O'Gorman has viewed as a series of crises: the American revolution crisis of 1779–84, the French revolutionary crisis of 1787–1801, the constitutional crisis of 1816–20 and the reform crisis of 1828–32.[76] All these crises brought the fear of revolution, the toppling of the party system and the collapse of parliamentary rule. Even the 'religious question', supposedly settled after the repression of the 1745 rebellion, still caused political violence and instability, as the Catholic antique collector Charles Townley found when forced to flee from his London home at the time of the Gordon riots to escape the attention of a 'Church and King' mob.[77] Yet perhaps the most important political division was not between Protestants and Roman Catholics, but between the increasingly fragmented elements of the Protestant churches. The pre-1835 unreformed units of city government, the corporations, were often dominated by Anglican

landowning interests associated with the Tory party. Many of the new urban middle class were Nonconformists allied to the Whig and Liberal parties. This politico-religious division was to cut across much of nineteenth-century urban political life and threatened the cultural fragmentation of the city's elite and perhaps even the destruction of urban forms of government. Following the 1835 Municipal Corporations Act, many Nonconformist Liberals, led by Cobden, urged urban populations to petition for new, more representative forms of city government. Sometimes, when these were granted, the Anglican Tories not only refused to co-operate but rejected the very legitimacy of these forms of administration.[78]

The economic fortunes of industrial cities were also prone to periodic shocks and instability. Britain had become a world trading power, and much of the country's expansion of trade was dependent on protecting its overseas commercial empire. The problems of the East India Company are well documented, but in Lancashire it was the American revolution that provided the greatest shock to the regional economy. Liverpool had emerged as a great international trading centre, but the abolition of the slave trade threatened to deprive it of an important component of its traditional business. The growth of French sea power threatened not only Britain's security, but all those ports tied into its growing maritime economy. Alongside these insecurities were the problems associated with the speculative nature of much of the early proto-industrial economy. The banking sector was relatively primitive and regionally fragmented. The collapse of one local bank could have profound repercussions for the whole of the city's economy. The most famous victim of a banking crisis was of course Liverpool's William Roscoe, whose own bank collapsed, resulting in the loss of almost all of his personal fortune. Roscoe was not the only 'man of culture' to suffer such an indignity. Henry McConnel, Manchester's pioneering collector of contemporary art, also suffered financial problems that forced the sale of much of his collection.[79] Even in the later nineteenth century, the unstable nature of mercantilist capitalist enterprise produced more victims. The plutocratic merchant Sam Mendel, famous for the ambitious development of a public art collection at Manley Hall, was a victim of the changing trade patterns brought about by the opening of the Suez Canal and ended his days in poverty.[80]

Given the instability in a rapidly expanding early industrial society, it is not surprising that much cultural debate focused on how to create stability and preserve progress. This debate was informed by an understanding of the rise and fall of past civilisations. The most famous contribution to this debate came,

of course, with Gibbon's *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*.[81] However, many eighteenth-century authors addressed the question of civil decline and often emphasised the relationship between stability and the flourishing of artistic and cultural endeavour. Shaftesbury, Winckelmann and Hume all made strong links between civil freedom, stability and artistic achievement. Thinkers from Thomas Paine to Adam Smith looked for the social causes that underpinned freedoms and provided the preconditions for the security of civil society.[82] A number of key Enlightenment thinkers helped to focus the debate about the failure of ancient civilisation and the contemporary progress of modern society.[83] Descartes's view that natural laws of God operated uniformly throughout all historical periods served to emphasise the importance of historical incidents and circumstances that created the discontinuities of history, such as the eclipse of Athens and the decline of the Roman Empire. Hume's account of human civilisation was one of very gradual progress, interrupted by breaks that overturned the natural order. The difficulty was that few thinkers, if any, produced a theory of accident or incident that destroyed these patterns of progress or development.[84] It was only with Ferguson's *Essay on the History of Civil Society* that a broader comparative 'theory of stagnation' began to emerge and enter popular discourse. Decline, for Ferguson, was the product of:

> those revolutions of state that remove, or withhold, the objects of every ingenious study or liberal pursuit; that deprive the citizen of occasions to act as the member of a public; that crush his spirit; that debase his sentiments, and disqualify his mind for affairs.[85]

The revolutions were not natural or inevitable processes, but rather the product of apathy, neglect and corruption. Thus moral actions, principles and institutions could guard against decline. Ferguson's approach to civic republicanism, with its focus on enlightened citizenship, clearly owed much to Cicero and Tacitus. His concern for neglect and corruption reflected both contemporary constitutional debate surrounding the Hanoverian constitution and recent Roman historiography, notably Hooke's work on the Roman Republic and Gibbon's work on luxury and political decline. Since De Beaufort's 1737 *Treatise on Liberty in Civil Society* historians had generally followed Polybius and Tacitus in identifying personal ambition and corruption as the major destructive force in political commonwealths.[86] However, Ferguson is particularly notable because of the popularity of his writing and the influence of his central conceptual idea surrounding constitutionalism and human nature. By 1782 his popularity rivalled

that of Gibbon, and his history of civil society was already in its fifth edition. His central idea, that decline could be defeated through the protection and advancement of civic virtue and liberal culture, became the dominant theme of civic humanist discourse. The idea was consistent with the emerging republic of taste and made the preservation and advancement of 'high culture' a moral necessity. The public nature of taste meant that it could not be too exclusive. A notion of taste that was defined too narrowly would fail to embrace the broad civic role that was essential if the civil state was to be protected.

The languages of civic humanism that emerged inevitably shaped the nature of art productions.[87] The traditional heroic school of epic paintings tended to be supplanted by one that emphasised softer, civic virtues related to cultured citizenship. This move is often associated with the lectures and writings of Sir Joshua Reynolds, but also reflects broader changes in literary taste away from the older notions of tragedy and epic.[88] These developments had a profound influence on practices of collecting and displaying art. As Pears observes, the possession of expensive objects had always been a way of achieving distinction, yet by the second half of the eighteenth century the notion of artistic connoisseurship had become increasingly important.[89] Knowledge and understanding of painting were central to the creation of a liberal public. From Richardson's guides to connoisseurship in the early part of the century, the discussion of taste was part of the public utility of art.[90] The creation of a liberal public required the creation of public spaces through which ideas and values could be disseminated. There existed printed media and the public meeting place, but the art institution could do more. Art institutions, like the RMI in the early nineteenth century or the Harris gallery fifty years later, could be monuments to specific concepts of taste or liberal virtue. They were physical and permanent manifestations of the ideas of their creators, shaping the assumptions and behaviour of the subsequent generations who passed through their gates.

Despite the increased scholarly interest in institutions as agents of social change, until recently art histories have been relatively silent on the general importance of institutional developments.[91] Other disciplines have increasingly begun to see institutions as important in shaping patterns of human behaviour rather than simply being reflections of that behaviour. In economics the 'institutionalist school' has a long history dating back to the late nineteenth century, when figures such as Veblen, Commons and Mitchell all but created a new orthodoxy as a reaction to modern neo-classical approaches.[92] Recently, the economic institutional school has enjoyed something of a revival, with an increasing awareness of the importance

of institutions in shaping the assumed natural laws of human activity.[93] This 'new institutionalism' has also become influential in political science, especially with the current debates about the development of supra-national bodies and the growth of the European community.[94] Political and social scientists have often examined institutions for their capacity to deliver public goods and their ability to mediate social tensions and regulate external forces. Art institutions operate in similar capacities, conciliating competing groups and reflecting the notions of culture and taste with which those groups identify.[95] However, institutions are also agents of transformation, articulating and legitimising social activities and practices that in turn shape the politics and identities of those with whom they come into contact.

In order to understand the role of institutions as agents, it is essential to examine the formative principles, historical ambitions, internal culture and social self-identity of the institution's constituent elements. These shape the norms and values within an institution and provide both the framework and constraints of all future decision-making. Similarly, it is important to be aware of the organisation's understanding of its own history and its evaluation of previous policy decisions.[96] This is not, however, to suggest that one should take a historically deterministic or 'path dependency' approach to the study of art institutions, nor necessarily invoke neo-Weberian models of bureaucratisation. Indeed, many of the art institutions in this study are characterised by their ability to respond to the changes around them, and some were accused of being too willing to change policy on the basis of artistic fashion. It was rare for one individual or group of individuals to control any art institution for a long period of time. Even when many art galleries were brought under municipal control at the end of the nineteenth century, the nature of political recruitment and promotion meant that art committee chairs changed frequently. Only the largest galleries had anything like a specialist permanent staff, and the few specialist curators that were in place were usually subject to close political control. Art committees were usually composed of shifting alliances of non-specialist public servants and a sprinkling of connoisseurs, which, as the studies illustrate, usually left the connoisseurs with a high degree of authority and autonomy. Art institutions tended to be characterised by informal systems of management and regulation, and were often dependent on the skill of a small number of interested enthusiasts.

The design, foundational principles and policy trajectory of an institution clearly provide an important framework for its ability to develop activities that

will shape its members, participants and audience. Social and political scientists have spent much time engaged in studying the 'designs' of organisations and their relationship to their future productive capacities.[97] However, it is important to recognise how organisations are capable of undergoing metamorphosis while apparently retaining the same structure of governance. Thus structures that are theorised as representative or open may, in their operational sociological dynamic, turn out to be much less so.[98] Similarly, superficial similarities in the management and structure of organisations do not necessarily imply operational or policy convergence. Almost all the municipal art galleries in Lancashire were administered by the same structures, by the same legislation and often by similar ruling principles. Yet the diversity of policy pursued suggests that the rationalism of the public sphere fostered a considerable degree of pluralism. This, in turn, suggests that the notions of 'art public' created by the prevailing paradigms of culture and taste were far from identical. This study will suggest that the tension between the preservation of taste and the pressure of the expansion of the public sphere created a number of highly differentiated 'art publics'. The different notions of 'art publics' were, of course, partly reflective of local differences and prevailing political ideology. Differences were also due to the fragmentation of the civic humanist discourse that had informed so much late eighteenth-century political thought.

The controversies about exactly who constitutes a public for art are complicated by the complex nature of collective identities inherent in nineteenth-century urban life. The universalist principles embedded in the language of liberal popular politics were particularly important in shaping the discourse of the public. Joyce, Vernon and Lawrence, among others, have shown how the category of 'the people' became a powerful mobilising force, allowing disparate groups to come together in a politically virulent form of imagined collective identity.[99] While early forms of art institution, such as the RMI and LRI, often reflected the concerns of an intellectual elite and the desire to create institutions of 'high culture', by the mid-nineteenth century the intellectual climate had changed. Pioneering municipal museums, such as the Royal Museum and Library at Salford, were geared instead to a mass audience, responding to the demands for the provision of rational recreation, open space and mass public education. Yet, by the end of the century, the public debate about taste and culture had changed again. Influenced by the cultural pessimism and the *fin de siècle* atmosphere of the 1890s, there was an increasing preoccupation with the corrosion of culture by a mass audience and the failure of art institutions to have inculcated taste in their

urban populations. The reactions, as this study shows, were many and various. Some attempted to assert a neo-liberal classicism, combining the universalistic language of modernism and the mass society with the objectivity inherent in Grecian standards of artistic excellence. Some sought a Ruskinian revolution in the nature and structure of museums, with the abandonment of the grand city museum and its replacement by communitarian forms of culture inspired by a largely imaginary pre-industrial past.[100] Others simply blamed the failure of modern British art and increasingly looked overseas to reinvigorate what was seen as a conservative and insular domestic art world.

These debates were not, of course, exclusive to Lancashire. One can see that museums in the United States also went through a complex phase of development as they attempted to wrestle with the problems inherent in their engagement with a growing mass society.[101] Art institutions in London faced comparable difficulties. The development of the first explicitly 'popular' metropolitan museum, the Victoria and Albert, has attracted particular interest from scholars. Goodwin has highlighted the difficulties of the museum in creating a coherent narrative and the tension between fine art and the more popular aspects of its activities.[102] Taylor shows how the dilemmas of mass society were also reflected in the access policy of the South Kensington Museum and, indeed, the types of behaviour to be permitted within its walls.[103] Debates about South Kensington were strategically important precisely because of the influence that the London authorities had over the development of regional museums.[104] However, in some respects, it was the traditional institutions of the nineteenth-century art world that were most disrupted by the disputed notion of 'art publics'. The narrowness and pernicious influence of the Royal Academy was so often a focus of criticism from outsiders. The long custom of using 'varnishing days' and private view days to provide commercial advantage to Academicians at the expense of outside painters was a long-running complaint and, for its critics, an example of how a supposedly noted public body used its power to secure private advantage for an established clique.[105] The difficulty was, of course, that the Royal Academy was not an exclusively public organisation; indeed it was really a private academy with state patronage. Yet it increasingly relied for cultural authority on its claim to be a national institution, rather than on its royal status. The academy had similar problems in its engagement with the commercial realities of late-nineteenth-century Britain. It was both a commercial organisation, dedicated to the sale of works of art, and an academy for the preservation of culture. In an earlier era when consumerism was limited to a

relatively small class, the tension between consumerism and culture could be contained. When mass consumption became the norm, writers such as John Eagles were quick to identify its apparently corrosive impact, where art became commodified and culture debased.[106]

Various strategies were adopted to resolve this tension. Perhaps the most widespread was to try to combine the rhetoric and iconography of universal access and participation with an essentially paternalistic management style. Again, the appropriation of classical forms was apparent. First, the classical forms built on the pre-existing discourse and preoccupations of eighteenth-century civic humanism, while providing objective standards by which innovation and contemporary culture could be measured. Secondly, their representative and democratic rhetoric could provide popular legitimacy, while allowing, in practice, significant scope for a paternalistic form of cultural leadership. Prior's work on the National Gallery of Scotland demonstrated how museum architecture of classical temples supported the rhetoric of universal access and legitimised culture through links to ancient civilisation, yet concealed a somewhat authoritarian leadership style.[107] In this view classicism was not undermined by the growth of a bourgeois public; rather the rising middle class embraced classicism as a way of understanding and regulating both the patterns of civic virtue and the canons of taste. Marchand's work on Germany has also emphasised the continuing strength of museum classicism throughout the nineteenth century, highlighting the cultural unity that classical education offered.[108] Wiener has similarly been keen to demonstrate the importance of classical education to the British middle class as part of their broader identity as gentleman capitalists.[109] Although many aspects of Wiener's broader thesis have been disputed, there can be little doubt about the growth of importance of classical education in the nineteenth century and how this coincided with increasing middle-class access to university education.[110]

In some respects, the use of classical models to legitimise art institutions only created a second-order problem; it left the tension between the rhetoric of participation and the desire for paternalistic leadership unresolved. The increasing involvement of the state in art institutions was one way in which institutions could present themselves as an expression of the public good. Once municipalised, art institutions were part of the formal machinery of local government, administered by elected councillors and funded through taxes by the consent of the electorate. However, municipalisation did not necessary imply democratisation. Vernon's work on the British nineteenth-century constitution has illustrated how the

creation of formally 'representative' institutions of government could lead to a reduction in certain forms of political participation and institutionalise the authority of existing political organisations. This could be done not only through formal patterns of exclusion, but also through the new cultural practices associated with 'representative' government.[111] The specialist nature of art knowledge ensured that most major decisions relating to art gallery management lay in the hands of a small group of councillors and officials with specialist understanding. Moreover, as several of these studies highlight, many councils continued to rely on unelected art advisors and private connoisseurs for the development of policy and for advice on hanging and purchases. In many cases the boundary between the activities of private organisations and the local state was blurred. Sometimes, as in the case of the RMI, the property of an art institution would be brought under public ownership, but that institution would still occupy the same premises and have a strong and formal influence over the city's art policy.[112] Similarly, art academies remained nominally independent, but were often dependent for their existence on either direct public grants or the use of municipal buildings for their operation. In the case of official corporation exhibitions, elected councillors rarely had a formal say in the selection and hanging of work, this task usually being left to a committee of private collectors or artists, sometimes joined by a sprinkling of elected representatives.

Few municipal art institutions or galleries were contemplated without some pecuniary assistance from private sources. Funding art institutions required a 'lumpy' pattern of finance. Large sums of initial capital were required, yet running costs were relatively low in comparison with other public facilities such as baths, libraries and schools. In most cases municipalities were prepared to pay operational costs from local taxation, but found it difficult to justify the capital investment inherent in the development of a new institution. The rapid growth in literacy, assisted by the 1872 Education Act, stimulated great public demand for circulating libraries, and throughout the 1870s corporations responded with large-scale investment in both central facilities and suburban branch libraries. This limited the funds available for art galleries, as those for art galleries and libraries came from the same budget, the limit of which was set by national legislation. The statutory restriction on spending could be circumvented only by an appeal to Parliament, but this was not always politically possible.[113] Large-scale investment in water and gas utilities between the 1850s and 1870s had led to significant increases in local government expenditure and taxation.[114] The regressive and inflexible nature of the local taxation system

meant that the lower middle class and 'shopocracy', an aspirational group that might otherwise have been appreciative of public cultural resources, were particularly badly affected.[115] By the 1870s property owners had begun to organise themselves in an attempt to resist the apparently inexorable growth of the local state, some developing into significant federations such as the United Property Owners Association, which was particularly active in the north of England.[116] These developments inevitably had an impact on the willingness of established political parties to increase rates for non-essential activities, and especially for cultural activities where it was thought private patronage might be available.

This study examines in some depth the complex intersections between the private and public financing of art institutions. In some cases, municipalities solved the difficulty of capital funding by absorbing existing cultural institutions. Manchester Corporation took over the RMI and, in the twentieth century, the Manchester Athenaeum, to use for art gallery purposes. However, this strategy was not without its limitations. The RMI's members continued to demand influence over art policy and forced the corporation to enter into a covenant requiring it to spend £2,000 per annum of public money on works of art over the following twenty years. Alternatively, corporations could seek sponsors and patrons to cover the cost of the capital investment required. Both of the region's largest purpose-built art galleries were funded in this way. Liverpool's Walker gallery was built using finance provided by the town mayor, and Preston's Harris gallery was developed through the bequest of one of Preston's most well-known public figures. However, the 'gifting' process associated with such activity is not unproblematic. Anthropological and sociological research on gifting has revealed the complex meanings and power relationship in a 'gifting' economy and the difficult issues of reciprocity associated with the acceptance of supposed benevolence.[117] When applied to art institutions this type of analysis reveals the difficulty of simply regarding gifts as benevolent cultural acts. Gifts need to be located within the broader moral and political economy of the city. This study reveals how cultural gifts provided political as well as cultural status, especially in the case of Liverpool, where Walker's gift of an art gallery was closely followed by the acquisition of national political honours. The study of art institutions can also give an insight into the limitations of the gift economy and 'philanthropy' more generally. As Walker was to discover, gifting that was seen as too brash and self-serving could damage public reputations, however apparently 'generous' the donor.[118]

Gifting was, however, a key part of institutional development. Where it was not used to provide capital for art gallery development, it often played an essential role in the development of collections. Even galleries which were generously financed by their municipality, such as Salford, relied on large amounts of private curatorial assistance and private donations for the development of their collections. Most of the smaller town galleries were entirely dependent on donors for major collections. Oldham's impressive collection of nineteenth-century watercolours is almost entirely drawn from one major donation: that of Charles E. Lees in 1888. Even the collecting and exhibiting policies of larger galleries were heavily influenced by individual donations. Manchester's collection of watercolours was framed around the donated collection of Roger Ross, while most of Preston's important modern works came from the home of a local lawyer, Richard Newsham. While municipal collections were commonly seen as expressions of collective taste and civic virtue, they often owed much to political circumstances and the collecting practices of particular individuals. Sometimes donors made specific demands of their museum recipients, requiring their collections to be displayed in particular ways and to acknowledge the munificence of their donor. Even when such restrictions were not imposed, donations inevitably shaped the nature of future collecting. Once a gallery was known to specialise in a particular type of work, dealers would inevitably encourage it to develop these strengths. Gaps had to be filled to ensure that collections were 'representative', while hangings were influenced by the preoccupations inherent within the original donor's collecting practices. Donations not only memorialised the donor and his taste: they gave a personal taste a public visibility which could ultimately be viewed as a component of a broader civic identity.

Lancashire never faced a controversy of public and private taste equivalent to that surrounding the famous Chantrey bequest disputes of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[119] However, cultural debates were fought out through the region's art institutions, and it was clear by 1914 that the regional art world faced something of a crisis. Part of the crisis was associated with the growing centralisation of the art market and the increasing reluctance of municipal authorities to fund art projects. Successful artists from the region had long gravitated to London, but by the outbreak of the First World War, only one successful annual modern exhibition remained: that of Liverpool.[120] Manchester City Council had refused to fund the development of a new art gallery because of public hostility to rising taxation at a time of high unemployment. Debate about the corrosive nature of consumerism and popular culture had fragmented the

art world into the neo-classicists on the one hand and the Ruskinian populists on the other. Large civic art museums were no longer seen as necessarily the most effective way of enhancing and diffusing culture and civic virtue. Critics argued that they were expensive and failed to meet their educational objectives. Some socialists saw the cultural forms of high art established by the middle class as offering little to working people and opposed public spending on new museums outright. Even middle-class urban cultural elites began to lose confidence in mainstream artistic canons of high art, including the work of leading figures in the world of British art. This was partly because British art had become an uncertain investment. The collapse of land values after 1901–2 sent shock waves through the luxuries market, and it soon became apparent that the 'bubble prices' paid for the works of many of the most popular Victorian artists could not be sustained. But the problem went deeper than this. Many Lancastrian patrons and opinion-formers had already begun to look overseas for cultural refreshment, often concluding that the British art scene was peculiarly insular. Lancashire was arguably more cosmopolitan and outward-looking than the London art world. Its international business connections, large European immigrant community and commercial networks encouraged a greater appreciation of overseas art than, perhaps, was possible in a metropolitan art world guarded by the canons of the Royal Academy. Liverpool was known for its interest in German art in the 1860s, Manchester developed a French proto-Impressionist school in the early 1870s, and by the Edwardian period both cities had thrown open their public galleries to modern overseas schools.[121] Municipal permanent collections, dominated by works of the modern British school, could appear less inspiring and, by 1914, somewhat out of date.

The economic decline of Lancashire from the late 1920s meant that the days of major public investment in visual art soon passed.[122] Yet an astounding institutional legacy remained. This volume will attempt to map the complexity of the cultural processes and preoccupations that created the public art institutions of Lancashire. Unlike some recent studies, it will not seek to locate the origins of public galleries in the ideas of one movement or set of ideas. Instead it will try to understand the complex urban processes that created the need and desire for public art institutions. Those processes not only changed significantly between 1780 and 1914, but could also differ between individual towns and often depended upon the preoccupations and values of individual promoter groups. While the desire to promote civic pride, disseminate high culture or educate a mass audience could be the stated goals of art gallery promoters,

these could conceal the more fundamental motivations of local leaders. The creation of art institutions was also an opportunity for self-promotion or for consolidating collective cultural authority, or simply a platform for asserting a specific cultural argument. By examining and mapping these processes, the discussion that follows will facilitate a better understanding of Lancashire's cultural history and also of the social forces that shaped the leadership of the region's major industrial towns.

NOTES

1 H. Rees Leahy (ed.), *Art, City, Spectacle: The 1857 Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition Revisited* (Manchester, 2009); U. Finke, 'The Art Treasures Exhibition', in J. H. G. Archer (ed.), *Art and Architecture in Victorian Manchester* (Manchester, 1985), 102–26; G. Scharf, 'On the Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition, 1857', *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, 10 (1857–58), 269–331. Also see *Catalogue of the Art Treasures of the United Kingdom Collected at Manchester* (London, 1857).

2 The classic statement of 1832's importance can be found in G. Trevelyan, *British History in the Nineteenth Century and After* (London, 1922). For recent critical assessments see J. Garrard, *Democratisation in Britain: Elites, Civil Society and Reform since 1800* (Basingstoke, 2002); E. Smith, *Reform or Revolution? A Diary of Reform in England, 1830–2* (Stroud, 1992): F. O'Gorman, 'Party Politics in the Early Nineteenth Century', *English Historical Review*, 102 (1987), 63–84; J. Phillips and C. Wetherell, 'The Great Reform Act of 1832 and the Political Modernization of England', *American Historical Review*, 100 (1995), 411–36.

3 For an introductory discussion of the industrialists' contribution to Victorian culture see A. Wohl, '"Gold and Mud": Capitalism and Culture in Victorian Britain', *Albion*, 23 (1991), 275–81.

4 For example, landmark contributions on private collecting include D. S. Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class: Money and the Making of Cultural Identity* (Cambridge, 1996); C. P. Darcy, *The Encouragement of the Fine Arts in Lancashire, 1760–1860* (Manchester, 1976); G. Chandler, *William Roscoe of Liverpool 1753–1831* (London, 1953); J. Seed, 'Commerce and the Liberal Arts: The Political Economy of Art in Manchester, 1775–1860', in J. Wolff and J. Seed (eds), *The Culture of Capital: Art, Power and the Nineteenth Century Middle Class* (Manchester, 1988), 45–81; M. Pointon, 'W. E. Gladstone as an Art Patron and Collector', *Victorian Studies*, 19 (1975), 73–98, M. Bennett, 'A Check List of Pre-Raphaelite Pictures Exhibited at Liverpool 1846–67, and Some of their Northern Collectors', *Burlington Magazine*, 105 (1963), 477–95.

5 C. Saumarez Smith, 'The Institutionalisation of Art in Early Victorian England', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 20 (2010), 113–25.

6 J. Treuherz, 'Ford Madox Brown and the Manchester Murals', in Archer (ed.), *Art and Architecture*, 162–207.