

ARISTOCRATIC FORTUNE TO CIVIC ASPIRATION: THE ROLE OF LANDED ELITES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF MANCHESTER'S PARKS

Introduction

This paper examines the relationship between the landed aristocracy in the vicinity of Manchester and the 'urban aristocracy' of the municipal authority and their role in the development of municipal parks in the city in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It contests the view that landed elites had little impact on the development of the environs of Manchester during this period and argues that their social and economic influence was gradually replaced by that of the municipal authority. It also re-examines the role of debt in the decline of the traditional landed elites and argues that, in the case of the two families studied here, debt became a problem much earlier than others have suggested and was often chronic and persistent.

Two aristocratic families are central to this study – the Egertons, Earls of Wilton, of Heaton Park (650 acres), Prestwich to the north-west of the city and the de Trafford family of Trafford Park (1200 acres) to the west of Manchester. Their estates, while symbolic of the social and economic power of the two families (neither was politically active at national level), were also commercial entities which were relied on to generate income and to secure future generations. Bateman's *Great Landowners of Great Britain and Ireland* lists the Wilton's holdings as follows: A total of 9,871 acres with a value of £32,490, consisting of 8,013 acres in Lancashire, 775 acres in West Yorkshire near Batley, 853 acres in Staffordshire, 196 in Somerset and 33 acres in Leicestershire¹. This places them within the top ten landowning families in Lancashire. Bateman lists the de

Trafford's total landholdings in 1879 as 9,800 acres in Lancashire (7,300 acres) and Cheshire (2,500 acres) with a value of £36,510².

The debate among academics about the nature of aristocratic indebtedness began in the 1950s between F.M.L. Thompson and David Spring and was subsequently developed further by John Habbakuk and David Cannadine³. The crux of this debate centred around the nature, extent, timing and impact of aristocratic debt on individual landowners, their families and their estates. Both of the aristocratic families in this study experienced high levels of debt in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, hence the relevance of this question. Crucially, they began to accumulate debt at an earlier stage than that proposed by many historians. Cannadine remarked that those aristocratic families who survived the difficult years of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were those with small, inherited debts and diverse sources of income⁴.

Both of the families in this study survived into the twentieth century and beyond in spite of considerable levels of debt. This supports Thompson's contention that debt alone was rarely ruinous and that families could, over the longer term, find ways of accommodating levels of debt and of repaying it⁵. Both families also tried to diversify their income sources to include stocks and shares and benefited from increased rental income from land that was close to urbanising areas. This undoubtedly eased the financial pressure somewhat but it was not a long-term solution as income from stock investments could not be guaranteed. While it is possible to regard the sales of aristocratic estates as primarily a response to rising levels of debt, it is equally dangerous to make this inference as a matter of course. Land sales and purchase were a regular feature of aristocratic estates and did not necessarily reflect a diminished financial position.

Debt eventually forced both families to try to sell their estates in 1896. Both public auctions failed and the families turned to Manchester City Council as a potential purchaser. Briggs and Gatrell have demonstrated the existence of a bourgeois-dominated local elite – an ‘urban aristocracy’ – of merchants and manufacturers in Manchester⁶. This elite allowed the civic life of Manchester to develop in circumstances where the local authority functioned more as an equal than a client in relation to local aristocrats. The negotiations between the Wiltons, the de Traffords and Manchester City Council are an apt illustration of the dominance of the municipality at this time. The final purchase of Heaton Park was achieved with many additional concessions acceded to by the Wiltons, while the de Traffords failed to convince the City Council that their estate represented a worthwhile investment. Manchester City Council had considerable entrepreneurial expertise – running its own gas and tramways departments successfully and profitably. They were thus well-placed to take advantage of the availability of aristocratic land at an advantageous price for the provision of public parks.

Aristocratic Elites, their Estates and the Municipality

Manchester provides a unique opportunity to study the impact of landed elites on the urban landscape due to the distance of their estates from the city boundaries. However, this physical distance from the city proper did not mean that they failed to establish and maintain commercial relationships with both the municipal authority and with local businessmen. Acts of 1835 and 1888 created boroughs and county boroughs respectively, while Manchester became a borough in 1838 and obtained city status in 1853. Prestwich became a borough in 1867 and one of the first elected councillors for the

area was W.E. Walker, Lord Wilton's agent at Heaton Park⁷. Walker's father and the former agent at Heaton Park, Richard Denham, was elected to Prestwich Local Board in 1881. A contemporary commentator noted the impact of the membership of local authorities by agents of large estates: 'He (R.D. Walker) was always willing to facilitate any business arising between the Board and the Earl of Wilton and many little concessions were obtained in this way that might otherwise have been lost'⁸. This is a striking example of the associations that developed between prominent estate employees and the local authority. It is rare that such relationships were visible, thus illuminating the often shadowy connections that existed among urban elite groups and individuals.

The families in this study relied on their land agents to manage the relationships with local entrepreneurs with regard to the renewal of leases and the negotiation of terms. In 1894, John Whittaker, leasee of Mount Sion Bleachworks in Prestwich, wrote to the Heaton Park estate to renegotiate the lease for a further fourteen years at a lower annual rent and asking that the Earl of Wilton pay for the provision of two new turbines for the plant to replace a broken water-wheel. The agent, W.E. Walker, replied to Whittaker: 'I could not advise the Estate to accept your offer. I am anxious to deal liberally with you but, as you will understand, in making arrangements for a new term, I must take into consideration all the circumstances'⁹.

A subsequent letter to Whittaker from Walker concludes: 'I think to accept a renewal on these terms (a reduced rent), the Estate ought not to be asked to contribute towards the expense of the turbines'¹⁰. This demonstrates the business acumen of professional agents like Walker when faced with entrepreneurs who were intent on using their own business skills to their advantage. Nevertheless, some sections of the

commercial class conducted their dealings with aristocratic estates with considerable confidence. In 1900, the Heaton Park estate was approached by James Adamson with a proposal to rent Ainsworth Lodge Farm. Adamson was part owner of Adamson and Barlow, two tailoring and clothing shops in Bolton and Manchester and approached his negotiations with the Wilton estate in a confident manner. He wrote of the proposed farm: 'We found generally the land is in an impoverished condition, somewhat more so than I expected....the universal opinion of my acquaintances who know it, is that the rental is too high, especially in its present condition. I should be glad if you will write me stating whether you can reduce the rent. I want nothing unreasonable'¹¹. By January 1901, Adamson's assertiveness had been rewarded and he had secured a series of repairs to the farm that he had requested before taking up the rental, demonstrating the concessions that could be gained as a result of such a request¹².

The relationship between the local aristocracy and the urban development of Manchester was not always amicable. Sir Humphrey de Trafford opposed the construction of the Manchester Ship Canal. His major objections were related to the impact that the canal would have on the physical layout of the de Trafford estate. He worried about the damage to the estate drainage and to the Barton entrance and that the waterway would affect the boundary of the park¹³. His opposition to the venture caused the re-routing of the canal onto 'land belonging to Lord Egerton and partially covered with buildings'¹⁴. The original plans had to be altered to avoid the de Trafford estate which was essentially pasture fields. His son and heir, Humphrey Francis, the third baronet, reopened negotiations with the Ship Canal on his father's death in 1886 and the plans were redrawn once again and a new Bill was brought before parliament¹⁵. These

delays to the Ship Canal ensured not only a frustration on the part of those desirous of exploiting the industrial potential of Manchester but also contrived to bring business people and investors into direct conflict with local aristocratic families who saw themselves as protecting their estates that had been in the family ownership for centuries.

The Manchester Ship Canal Act of 1885 contained many clauses that were negotiated to protect the Trafford Park estate and to provide opportunities for the de Traffords to exploit the canal for their own purposes. Clause 6 provided for the construction and maintenance of a fence with gates around the estate, while clause 7 allowed the building of wharves and landing places on the canal by the de Trafford estate to be used for free. Approaches to the wharves for carts could also be constructed to allow for the dispersal of nightsoil, refuse cinders or stable dung from the estate¹⁶. The Ship Canal Company had agreed with Sir Humphrey's concerns about drainage on his estate and arranged for the provision of culverts and drains on the estate and also permitted the de Traffords to use the canal water for agricultural or manufacturing purposes¹⁷. Other local aristocrats who were also protected by clauses in the Act were marquis of Cholmondeley and Lord Egerton of Tatton. These clauses demonstrate that the de Traffords were alert to the dangers of industrial development like the Manchester Ship Canal and that they were successful in lobbying the canal company to respond to their concerns.

The relationship between the local aristocracy and the municipal boroughs could occasionally be tense. In 1878, Bury Corporation was attempting to buy Little Britain Farm in Radcliffe from the Earl of Wilton with a view to using the land for sewerage works. Estate correspondence shows that James Farren, an independent surveyor in Bury

warned the Heaton Park agent R.D. Walker, that Bury Corporation would find the price for the farm too expensive. A postscript to the letter adds: 'You must state in writing anything to the Bury Corporation...as they may go in for compulsory powers and make you no offer at all'¹⁸. While the estate was clearly keen to negotiate the best price for the land, they also ran the risk of exposing themselves to a compulsory purchase order. As the negotiations for the purchase continued, the mayor of Bury together with the Town Clerk and the Borough Surveyor called on Walker at the estate office in Prestwich¹⁹. They were keen to acquire the land for the urgent provision of sewerage services in the area. The farm was valued at £400 per statutory acre by Farren and was described by him as 'a most valuable site for all description of works and has very extensive water rights attached'²⁰. Like the Traffords, the Wiltons were reluctant to sell land with water rights unless at the right price, explaining their position with regard to this farm.

The following year, the Heaton Park estate was again engaged in selling land in Radcliffe to Bury Corporation. On this occasion, the Earl of Wilton's Manchester solicitors, Slater Heelis, returned a draft of the sale agreement to the Heaton Park agent R.D. Walker. The draft had been altered by Bury Corporation to the effect that the agreed sale price of £10,354 would now include 'full compensation for all damage to adjoining lands of the vendor and for all annoyance of any kinds and for all works, drains, sewers and other easements which the vendor might otherwise be entitled to claim'²¹. The letter concludes with the view of William Slater of Slater Heelis that he 'should like to have your (R.D. Walker's) opinion as to the probable effect of this alteration; it is no part of the arrangement so far as I understand'²². Whether this was a deliberate attempt by Bury Corporation to prevent the estate suing for compensation in the future as it had done with

some railway companies in the past, is not certain, but it does suggest that the earl's solicitors were carefully reading all documents emanating from borough corporations to ensure that there was no legal sleight of hand.

Approaches to dealing with municipal authorities varied – there is evidence that the two principal landowners in Bury, north of Manchester, Lords Derby and Wilton, were frequently brought into conflict with each other due to their differing approaches to the developing borough. Lord Wilton was often content to sell land to Bury Corporation while Lord Derby often opposed this action. Lord Derby also disagreed with many policies of the new borough and was obstructive in questioning the need for his land to be paved and being slow to fund this work²³. This is evidence of Derby's continuing opposition to new urban developments, similar to his stance against the Liverpool to Manchester railway in 1820. Therefore, the relationship between members of the landed aristocracy, even at local level, cannot be taken for granted.

Lord Wilton was himself capable of opposing the actions of local authorities, especially when they threatened the physical integrity of his estate. In 1897, he opposed the building of an infectious diseases hospital by Bury Corporation due to its proximity to Lower Spen Moor farm, a grazing farm of about 27 acres. He argued that the presence of the hospital would 'seriously depreciate' the value of the farm and would result in a reduction in the rent being asked²⁴. In 1899, he opposed the plans of the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway Company to build a new line linking Manchester, Blackley and Middleton which was proposed to run through part of his Blackley estate. His petition to the House of Lords against the railway cited the Blackley land as 'eminently adapted for development as a building estate' and the threatened presence of the railway as 'seriously

and prejudicially' affecting his interest ²⁵. During the latter half of the nineteenth century, local and municipal authorities became more acquisitive and confident about buying land, water rights and properties, previously the preserve of the aristocracy ²⁶. The acquisition of these elements gave added legitimacy to the new local authorities and ensured the decrease in aristocratic power in the new towns and cities. However, this process was not instantaneous and did not apply to all such urban areas. As we have seen, the Wiltons and the de Traffords did not challenge the new municipalities, their interests having either moved on elsewhere in the case of the Wiltons or having ended up in a degree of mutual compromise as with the de Traffords.

As the nineteenth century progressed, the forms of political power and prestige held by the aristocracy altered but did not disappear entirely. Indeed, as late as 1867, over 500 of the 698 MPs were still members of the landed aristocracy so their influence on national politics remained strong²⁷. The balance of the membership of successive British governments only began to swing away from the landed aristocracy post-1916²⁸. This fact, however, neglects the aristocrats like the Wiltons and the de Traffords who were not active in national politics. At local level, their direct influence as magistrates and lords of the manor was replaced by more indirect forms of influence such as social, cultural and charitable leadership and the evolving relationship with the new municipalities as landowners. All of these aspects can be observed in the case of both the Wiltons and the de Traffords. Their symbolic role remained in the community as their political power both nationally and locally changed.

Traditionally, the power of the Wiltons and the de Traffords lay in their local communities, their charity work and in their landownership. Patronage and charitable

works rooted them in the local community in ways that their landowning or lack of political role denied them. It also brought them into a mainly collaborative rather than a confrontational relationship with the new urban presence in such proximity to their estates. Moreover, it also emphasised the continuing public esteem for a title. There is little evidence of deference in their economic relationships with local authorities and businessmen and the Trafford Park estate in particular was adversely affected by urban developments like the Manchester Ship Canal. The attempts by both families to sell their estates in their entirety at this time provide further evidence of their isolation from the area.

By 1825, Manchester was almost entirely devoid of a resident aristocracy due partly to the lack of a parliamentary seat in the town and also to religious and political schisms that existed between the local commercial classes²⁹. Offer has argued that the new city councils had taken on the power, prestige and patronage relinquished by the aristocracy and indeed contemporaries referred to middle class urban leaders as the town's 'aristocracy'³⁰. Historians like Briggs and Fraser have developed the idea of an urban aristocracy in towns without a resident aristocracy proper, like Manchester³¹. There is evidence to suggest that the aristocracy did not surrender these assets easily nor always to municipal bodies. Moore points out that, in fact, there is no causal relationship between the rise of the urban bourgeoisie and the decline in aristocratic political power³². Cannadine acquiesces in this but remarks that this period in municipal development was characterised by some decline in the local and regional political influence exercised by the aristocracy and a corresponding increase in the local significance of the middle classes. He also argues that the aristocracy as a group was not especially cohesive and

that some aristocrats maintained their close links with towns like the Calthorpes in Edgbaston, which was not the case in Manchester³³.

Large parts of Manchester such as Blackley (the site of a Manchester Corporation housing estate in the 1890s) were owned by the Earl of Wilton during the nineteenth-century and rapidly became urban due to their proximity to the city centre. Similarly, the Stretford lands of the de Traffords became urbanised due in part to the development of rail links between Manchester and Cheshire. However, ownership of land was no longer sufficient to guarantee a high rental income; the land needed to be situated in an urban or soon-to-be urban area. Cannadine has proposed that the rise of the new merchant and industrial middle class during and after the industrial revolution, gave this social group both the money and the opportunity to copy the lifestyle of the aristocracy³⁴. He claims that the widespread construction of the urban villa was an attempt to emulate the building of country houses during the eighteenth century but on a smaller, suburban scale. The pattern was thus for newly-wealthy merchants to buy or build country houses in imitation of large landowners, but without the estates that went with those of the aristocracy³⁵. The industrial engineer Joseph Whitworth built his own villa but also became an MP and a baronet and had a country seat in Matlock³⁶. In reality, very few Manchester businessmen managed to emulate the landed aristocracy with the exception of Samuel Loyd created Lord Overstone in 1850³⁷.

This section has shown how the aristocratic Wilton and de Trafford families conducted their business relationships with Manchester City Council during the nineteenth century. It has demonstrated the high levels of commercial engagement between the landowning families and the local authority as the city developed. This

relationship has not previously formed part of existing histories of the city, perhaps due to the fact that both families lived outside of the boundary of the city proper. At local level, their direct influence as magistrates and lords of the manor was replaced by more indirect forms of influence such as social, cultural and charitable leadership and the evolving relationship with the new municipalities as landowners. All of these aspects can be observed in the case of both the Wiltons and the de Traffords. Their symbolic role remained in the community as their political power both nationally and locally changed. Their patronage and participation remained crucial to the success of events such as the Manchester Art Treasures exhibition held at Trafford Park in 1857 and again in 1887. While the principal organisers of these exhibitions was the business elite of the city, the main lenders of works of art were the landed families such as the de Trafford and Lord Wilton, who was prevailed upon by the organisers to arrange for the loan of paintings from other members of the aristocracy³⁸. The aristocracy had ceased to be the instigators of these kinds of projects but their support and patronage remained important, especially in the field of art collecting where their own possessions were the fruit of past generations.

The reordering of the social landscape was typical of much of the process of accommodation that continued during the nineteenth century between the old aristocratic class and newer social groups such as army officers, manufacturers and merchants. Entry and acceptance into the aristocracy was not widespread. Accommodation and compromise also characterised the relationship with the new municipalities. Both the de Traffords and the Wiltons had cordial dealings with Manchester Corporation; dealings with the railway companies and the process of industrialisation of Manchester were

sometimes more fractious, especially between the de Traffords and the Manchester Ship Canal Company. The evidence discussed here has shed new light on the relationship between two medium-sized landowning families and the municipal authority of Manchester. Some of the most fruitful business dealings between the landed families and Manchester City Council would prove to be the sales of land for public parks.

The Rise of Civic Power and a new Urban Elite

Unlike other British cities such as Leeds, Liverpool and Glasgow, Manchester had been slow to acquire land for public recreation. In part, this was due to a lack of philanthropic donations of land which had occurred in the cities just mentioned. This meant that Manchester had had to purchase or acquire by public subscription the land for her earliest public parks opened in Bradford (a suburb of Manchester) and Harpurhey in 1846. However, the city was expanding rapidly and the creation of new publicly-funded parks had not kept pace with the growing population. Parks were identified at the time as a vital ‘green lung’ for the overcrowded city and as serving a useful moralising purpose to keep the working classes from the twin evils of gambling and drinking (‘rational recreation’)³⁹.

In the late 1890s, Trafford Park and Heaton Park were offered for sale to Manchester City Council. Both estates had been the subject of failed public auctions and both families had been under increasing financial pressure. This pressure on the Wilton family had resulted from the accumulation of death duties after the deaths of the 2nd Earl in 1882 and his two sons (the 3rd and 4th Earls, respectively) in 1885 and 1898. Jointures to the surviving dowager Countesses of Wilton coupled with the preference for their

Melton Mowbray estate of the 5th Earl, meant that the sale of the Manchester estate was the only solution to their financial position. The de Trafford family were under threat of foreclosure by the mortgagee of Trafford Park due to the acute gambling debts of the third baronet, Humphrey Francis de Trafford and his wife, coupled with his habit of arranging secret loans from moneylenders at exorbitant interest rates⁴⁰.

The customary response of the City Council to the acquisition of land at the time was to establish a Special Sub-committee to investigate the possible acquisition, especially in terms of price and location. The political balance of members of Manchester City Council at the time under consideration made it difficult for a consensus to emerge on either the purchase of Trafford Park or Heaton Park. In 1896, the City Council consisted of 26 aldermen and 78 councillors, while the Parks and Cemeteries committee had 28 members in 1896 and 22 members in 1901. The political affiliations of the Parks and Cemeteries committee for these years shows the Conservatives with a majority of four over the Liberals in 1896 and a majority of six in 1901. In practice, however, these party affiliations were often less important than an individual's personal stance on any issue.

In 1896, after no progress in negotiations with the de Traffords and a public opinion that was described by the *Manchester City News* as 'apathetic', the Special Sub-committee on Trafford Park was re-established under the chairmanship of Sir John Harwood⁴¹. Harwood was a Liberal who made his money from a paint business and had been a strong proponent of the Manchester Ship Canal. He had been chairman of the Waterworks committee during the period of the construction of the Thirlmere pipeline

from the Lake District to Manchester which opened in 1894. Experienced in supervising large municipal projects, he was regarded as a 'long-standing municipal reformer'⁴².

However, dissent was still evident on the Special Sub-committee as Alderman Clay (Liberal Unionist) continued to oppose the move on the grounds of the purchase price and its consequent impact on the rates. The purchase price of Heaton Park was equally divisive within the City Council. On 15 July 1896, members of the City Council inspected the estate⁴³. Doubts were still being expressed by some members, principally because of the asking price of the estate, which then stood at £275,000. The monthly City Council meeting in October noted that they would reconsider their decision if the price could be negotiated⁴⁴.

The City Council's financial position in the late nineteenth century had become the subject of much public debate. The principal outlay in previous years had been a loan of some £5 million to ensure the completion of the Manchester Ship Canal. This loan consisted of £3 million lent in April 1891 and a further £2 million in October 1892 and caused a 2d in the pound rise in rates, increasing the Corporation's debts by 65 per cent⁴⁵. During the negotiations for Trafford Park in 1896, Alderman Clay reminded his fellow councillors that Manchester was 'the highest rated city in England' and that the city's debts had grown from £7.5m in 1891 to over £15 million⁴⁶. In later years, Manchester City Council's actions during this time would be lauded as a 'flagship for municipal enterprise on a new scale', but the Ship Canal project, at the time of its construction and in the years immediately afterwards, was not always perceived so positively⁴⁷.

The Ship Canal Company was slow to make payments to the City Council on the interest on the loan, which increased to £225,000 annually. By 1902, the Ship Canal

Company owed more than £1.4 million in interest payments alone to the City Council. They were paying some money for interest each year but the amount varied from £33,729 for 1899-1900 to £50,000 for the year 1900-1901. This did mean that the principal continued to remain at just over £5 million and that money from the rates had to be used to make up the deficit in the annual sum of about £160,000⁴⁸. However, the debts of the Ship Canal aside, the municipal finances were not entirely unhealthy (Table 1). Assets continued to outweigh liabilities and the City Council produced an annual surplus during the period under investigation. Its levels of secured debt continued to rise at this time but this had begun to ease somewhat after the mid-1890s.

The spending of public money on land and projects outside the city boundaries was not without precedent – the City Council had built Thirlmere aqueduct in 1877 to transport water to the city from the Lake District in Cumbria. In so doing, they had acquired the manorial rights to the adjacent land, which required the chairman of the Waterworks committee to act as the manorial lord⁴⁹. This is a clear illustration of the willingness of the local authority to function as an aristocratic elite. The scheme was also subjected to adverse comment both from councillors and the local press on the grounds of price and the speculative nature of the enterprise⁵⁰. Investments in municipal enterprise were becoming a significant part of municipal governance notwithstanding the ‘municipal ebb and flow’ that characterised local authority activity in many English cities⁵¹. City Council members were commonly responsible for greater assets and liabilities than other local bodies and were, therefore, burdened with many financial duties⁵².

In the case of both Trafford Park and Heaton Park, the evidence suggests that it was the representatives of the vendors who made the initial approaches (despite the claims of the de Traffords to the contrary) to the City Council as prospective purchasers. The *Manchester City News* of 4 February 1893 reported that Manchester City Council had been exploring the possible purchase of Trafford Park⁵³. It was also the case that the de Trafford family had had previous business dealings with the Cleansing committee of Manchester City Council in the sale of Chat Moss in 1893 for sewage disposal. The family may, therefore, have regarded the city as the most likely purchaser for the entire estate. There is evidence that the negotiations for Chat Moss were complex and resulted in a misunderstanding between the Corporation and the vendors in November 1893 when it emerged that the land for sale did not include a strip of land abutting the Manchester Ship Canal and which the Corporation had assumed was included. At the time, Alderman Shaw of the Cleansing committee commented that he ‘...did not consider that the committee had been well-treated in the matter’⁵⁴.

Both the de Trafford and Wilton families expressed a preference to sell to the City Council as opposed to a private buyer. The estates had already been the subject of failed auctions so there was evidence that private buyers were not interested, certainly not at the prices being asked. Lord Wilton commented at a meeting with representatives of the City Council to discuss Heaton Park in June 1901, that ‘he was willing to transfer the estate on more favourable terms than he would let it go to any ordinary company or purchaser’⁵⁵. Indeed, shortly after the failed attempt to purchase Trafford Park, Lord Wilton’s London land agents wrote to the Lord Mayor of Manchester to remind him that their estate was available and to emphasise its advantages over Trafford Park. The letter, dated 30 June

1896, mentions Heaton Park's 'advantages over Trafford on hygienic grounds, from its elevated position and being out of close contact with manufacturing properties such as are on the fringe of Trafford'⁵⁶.

However, Manchester City Council did not have much experience of buying and keeping such estates intact. They had either bought or been given gifts of much smaller parcels of land for public recreation and had no precedent in buying much larger spaces for public parks. Neither did they have much interest in historic building conservation. In 1896, the City Council purchased Clayton Hall, the home of Humphrey Chetham along with eight acres of land. In April of that year, they contemplated demolishing the house⁵⁷. Hendham Hall in Queen's Park (acquired in 1846) was demolished in 1880 to make way for a new building. Given that Manchester City Council was involving itself increasingly in commercial enterprises such as the Manchester Ship Canal, this assumption that they would preserve the estates is surprising. It is noteworthy that, among the City Council's initial instincts when considering the future usage of the estates, commercial imperatives were predominant. These included plans to sell the strip of land at Trafford Park that bordered the Ship Canal and plans to build houses along the edges of Heaton Park.

A substantial number of the wider business community in Manchester supported and lobbied for the proposed purchases. These men, who included Sir William Houldsworth MP (a director of the London and North-West Railway Company), Herbert Philips, Sir Elkanah Armitage and James Watts (of S & J Watts & Company) signed a memorial of 400 signatures to the Lord Mayor advocating the use of Trafford Park not just as a public park but 'for judicious development for commercial and residential purposes'⁵⁸. The memorialists called themselves the Citizens' Committee (although they

were citizens of a particular kind – the business elite of Manchester). Close association between prominent local businessmen and members of Manchester City Council was not unusual during this period, leading to Briggs' comment about the emergence of an urban aristocracy based on local economic power and influence.

The relationship between Manchester City Council and both aristocratic families was characterised by their previous commercial experiences of each other and by the lack of political consensus to buy either Trafford Park or Heaton Park. The families were intent on getting the highest price for their estates while the City Council was mindful of balancing potential opposition from ratepayers with pressure from private enterprises. The City Council's history as an enterprising body with experience of substantial investments in projects such as the Manchester Ship Canal and the Thirlmere pipeline should have made the case for the purchase of either of the parks but conflicting agendas and influences resulted in decision-making process that lacked a firm consensus. As a consequence of its cautious deliberations, Manchester lost the opportunity to acquire Trafford Park when it was sold to a private developer in 1896. It subsequently became an industrial estate.

In March 1901, the Parks and Cemeteries committee again discussed the proposed purchase of Heaton Park at a price of £230,000 (Figure 1). On this occasion, eight members were in favour of the purchase with four against. The lowered price was a reflection of the attempts by the Wilton family to make the estate attractive to the Council and was effectively giving them a free rein to use the estate as they wished⁵⁹. In April 1901, the Parks and Cemeteries committee appointed a Sub-committee to ask Lord Wilton to give the council three months to consider buying the estate and to lower the

price further⁶⁰. On 30 April 1901, a meeting took place in London between Grover Humphreys (Lord Wilton's solicitors) and representatives of the Corporation to discuss the price. The deputy Town Clerk for Manchester, Thomas Hudson raised several issues of concern, specifically, doubts about the amount of coal under the property, the water rights which prevented building on parts of the estate, and the dilapidated condition of the boundary walls and buildings generally⁶¹.

A meeting of the City Council in June 1901 rejected an attempt by Councillor Ashton to make a new offer of £210,000 for the estate, this being the difference between the earl's price (£230,000) and the City Council's last offer (£190,000). The amendment was rejected by 28 votes to 44⁶². Councillor Halliday opposed the amendment on the grounds of the railway line running under the estate, the alleged dry rot in Heaton Hall and the sum of £8,000 per annum required to point the boundary wall⁶³. Councillor Richards also opposed the amendment, arguing that the money be spent on improving housing in the city's slum districts⁶⁴. An anonymous ratepayer writing to the *Manchester Guardian* suggested that the provision of a further public park for the city was redundant on the grounds that '...if the people want a real day out, they can and do afford a day to the country or Blackpool'⁶⁵.

A meeting of the Special Sub-committee on 16 July 1901 resolved to find out whether Lord Wilton would be willing to include additional land in the deal, especially if that land lay between the estate and city boundary, bringing the two closer together⁶⁶. A letter to Thomas Hudson from Grover Humphreys dated 24 July 1901 stated that the selling price would not go below £230,000 but that there was the possibility of including an extra 32 acres of land between the park and the city boundary at no extra charge.

The effect of this additional land was to bring the park closer to the city boundary and to remove ‘a portion at least of the opposition offered to the purchase by the Corporation’⁶⁷. The 32 acres had been secured from Lord Wilton at the meeting with the Parks and Cemeteries committee in London to discuss the progress of the negotiations. In addition to the extra land, there was some commercial property on Middleton Road between the park boundary and the 32 acres. This meant that the City Council not only acquired 650 acres of Heaton Park but also the certainty of some rental income in future. This was all achieved without any increase in the purchase price of £230,000.

This part of the negotiation having been concluded, the Parks and Cemeteries committee asked to have until 31 August 1901 to make a final decision. A postscript to Humphreys’ 24 July letter to Hudson added: ‘Since writing the above, we have received a telegram from Lord Wilton desiring us to ask the Corporation to kindly let him have a definite answer by the 24 of August if possible, as he has other proposals to consider and the delay has already been considerable’⁶⁸. There is no evidence that there were any other active proposals for the purchase of Heaton Park at this time, but Lord Wilton was clearly anxious to keep up the pressure on the City Council, especially having given the concession of the extra land.

At their meeting on 26 July 1901, the Parks and Cemeteries committee agreed a motion to accept the offer of Heaton Park plus the extra land for £230,000. The vote was evenly split - seven members for and seven against. Of those who voted, three Liberals and four Conservatives were in favour of the purchase, while two Liberals and five Conservatives were against the proposal (Table 2). The chairman, Alderman Birkbeck’s, casting vote was in favour of the motion and it was carried. There is also no evidence of

the impact of distance from Heaton Park on the vote. Councillors from distant wards like Longsight, Openshaw and Rusholme were both in favour of and opposed to the park, while Councillor Grantham from the nearby ward of Crumpsall was opposed. The decision was approved by the full City Council and the committee then agreed to inform the Parliamentary Sub-committee to include in the next act of parliament the ‘power to sell, lease, appropriate and use Heaton Park as they see fit’⁶⁹.

Another obstacle arose just prior to the completion of the sale. This related to the ownership of the water rights on the estate. They constituted a valuable resource for the nearby factories and bleaching mills, especially at a time when the rental income from Heaton Park was only estimated at between £1000 and £1500 per year⁷⁰. At a meeting of the Parks and Cemeteries committee on 18 October 1901, Hudson presented the draft sale agreement which noted the fact that the purchase price did not include the water rights to the estate, which had been leased to Frederick Cawley, M.P. for Prestwich 1895-1918 and a local bleachworks owner, and to John Hill and Co., both for a period of 21 years⁷¹. The original assumption made by the City Council was that both the mineral and water rights were included in the purchase price. When it became clear that the water rights were not, the negotiations became deadlocked.

The Earl’s solicitors, Grover Humphreys, argued that the water rights had not been included in the failed public auction in 1896. However, the City Council felt that the inclusion of the water rights was vital as ‘the user of the property must not be hampered by any restrictions’⁷². Humphreys countered that Lord Wilton was ‘not prepared to forego rights which are of great importance to the Wilton estate and which could not interfere with the enjoyment of the property as a public park or detract from its value’⁷³.

Hudson's reply was equally emphatic, stating that 'at all our interviews, it has been insisted on behalf of the Corporation that they should not be restricted in any way in the use of the land or any part of it'⁷⁴.

As a way of resolving the apparent deadlock, J.H. Green, auctioneer and valuer to Lord Wilton, wrote to the Special Sub-committee and requested a meeting. Green took credit for the agreement to include the extra land in the purchase price, writing: 'I can emphatically say that such a concession was never at any time previously contemplated on any sale'⁷⁵. Green met with the Special Sub-committee in November 1901 and suggested that the water rights should devolve entirely to the City Council, an offer which was accepted. The water rights were a valuable resource, guaranteeing a future income to the new owners. While there had been little vocal opposition to the purchase of Heaton Park, some protests had been voiced by organisations such as the Manchester, Salford and District Property Owners' Association, a group of local ratepayers who were generally opposed to municipal expenditure. An ability to demonstrate that the new park could provide at least some level of income was vital in making the case to the public that the estate was a worthwhile investment.

The remaining tenancies on the estate were also ceded to the Council on their expiry, although the only tenancy was of the gardens and the greenhouse on twelve months notice⁷⁶. The vendors included in the sale a three and a half acre piece of land that comprised the avenue in front of the park by the Grand Lodge. It is, therefore, not surprising that, at the conclusion of the negotiations, Alderman Birkbeck felt that 'they had been met...with great candour, more candour than was usual in a lawyer's office...the vendors had been very straightforward'⁷⁷.

The situation with regard to the ownership of water rights on the estate having been resolved, the Special Sub-committee visited both Heaton Park and the Hall on 6 December 1901 to inspect their new property, accompanied by W.E. Walker (Heaton Park agent) and William Whinnerah (Lord Wilton's surveyor). They were shown the site of the extra land that had also been acquired and they went through lists of fixtures and fittings from the Hall that had been drawn up by Lord Wilton's representatives.

A final meeting in London on 20 December 1901 with Lord Wilton's representatives clarified the terms of the sale, including the funding of three bridges over the river Irk by Lord Wilton alone; the joint construction of a new road from Middleton Road to Rochdale Road; the consolidation of both lists of fixtures and fittings from the Hall (that is, the City Council would get most of the contents included in the sale price); an agreement to re-arrange the boundaries of Lord Wilton's remaining estate on the incorporation of Heaton Park into the city of Manchester; a clause that required the vendor to agree to the incorporation and the ability of the vendor to sell by auction at Heaton Park any furniture or chattels not included in the sale. Manchester City Council planned to apply to the Local Government Board for the money to fund the purchase. On 24 December 1901, the intention of the Corporation to purchase Heaton Park was confirmed publicly and negotiations that had originally begun in 1896 were finally concluded.

The strategic importance of Heaton Park to Manchester can be observed from an examination of a map that outlines the acquisition of nearby boroughs by the city, beginning in 1885 (Figure 2). Heaton Park complemented the already-acquired districts of Blackley, Moston and Crumpsall and sent an important signal to other boroughs such

as Middleton about Manchester's intentions in this area. The extra land concessions that were included in the purchase facilitated the incorporation of Heaton Park into the city of Manchester by bringing its existing boundary closer to that of the city. The incorporation also involved negotiation with just one district – Prestwich, unlike Trafford Park which would have needed the agreement of four districts, including Manchester's long-time rival, Salford.

After the acquisition of Heaton Park, the City Council moved quickly to establish their new ownership. A series of iron boundary posts was erected around the perimeter of the park while some local concessions accorded by the aristocratic former owners were lost. Employees of a nearby bleachworks were forbidden the use the park as a shortcut to work in the early hours of the morning as they had been allowed to do by the previous owner. The owner of the factory, Robert Cawley, an influential local businessman, contacted the Parks and Cemeteries committee to query this decision, writing that 'it seems strange to the men that democratic ownership of the park should be so much more inconsiderate to working men than aristocratic ownership'⁷⁸. While the actions of the City Council in this case can be seen as a precautionary measure, it also represented a new style of ownership, conscious of the need to secure possession of a new amenity and the desire to protect their new investment.

The experience of Manchester City Council in purchasing Heaton Park can be compared to that of other municipal boroughs that were negotiating the purchase of open spaces. In November 1902, Salford Corporation purchased the 32 acre Buile Hill estate for £22,500 from the Bennett family for use as a public park. This estate was located within the boundaries of that city but debates about a purchase had been underway since

1897, mirroring the long negotiations for Heaton Park. The early discussions were dominated by references to Manchester's loss of Trafford Park and fears that the same situation would occur in Salford⁷⁹. There was sufficient dissent within the Salford Parks and Cemeteries committee for the council to remove the final decision from their hands and allow the Mayor, Richard Mottram, to conclude the negotiations⁸⁰. Like Heaton Park, Buile Hill had an architecturally significant mansion (designed by Charles Barry) for which a use had to be found – it became a natural history museum. There was opposition to the purchase from ratepayers representatives who feared a rise in the rates to pay for the park⁸¹.

Leeds City Council had purchased the 800 acre Roundhay Park in 1871 for £139,000⁸². Like Heaton Park, the site was located five miles from the city centre. The initiative for the purchase had come from the mayor of Leeds, John Barran who funded part of the purchase cost from his own money⁸³. Tramlines to the park were not laid until 1891 by which time it was being described by opposers as 'a big white elephant'⁸⁴. Similarly, Liverpool City Council's purchase of land for two parks, Sefton Park and Stanley Park, in the 1860s, was controversial due to the sites - Sefton Park was located in a middle-class area while the smaller Stanley Park was in a working-class district of the city⁸⁵. Parts of both Sefton and Roundhay Parks were sold for building land to recoup some of the purchase and development costs. Both of these councils were active in the purchase and laying out of major public parks earlier than Manchester. However, Manchester now had the satisfaction of having acquired one of the largest public parks in Europe and a significant addition to her urban landscape.

Conclusion

Several significant findings emerge from this study – the revisiting of the issue of aristocratic debt has shed new light on the extent of personal and lifestyle factors on levels of spending and the fact that land sales did not mean the end of financial difficulties. It has also been demonstrated that periods of severe financial difficulty among the aristocratic families in this study could be overcome in the long term and that the families could and did survive, albeit on smaller estates. The process of land sales was a constant factor in the lives of the families in this study yet neither of their estates was attractive enough to the new business class in the late Victorian period, both being too large. Neither of the families studied here has been examined in any detail heretofore but their family and estate papers provide an insight into their lives and the social and economic significance of their estates in this locality.

It is evident from this study that the business relationships that existed between aristocratic families in the Manchester vicinity and the City Council were based on compromise and concession. From the late nineteenth, the financial consequences of extravagant lifestyles and higher death duties meant that these landowning families came to the conclusion that sale of their estates was the sole solution to their problems. There was certainly a connection between increasing levels of debt and the large-scale sale of aristocratic estates, however reluctantly this was undertaken. Post-sales, the Wiltons moved to a rented estate in Norfolk while the de Traffords based themselves in Leicestershire, where Sir Humphrey Francis de Trafford was declared bankrupt in 1907. Debt, however, was often avoidable and could be a temporary state. The de Traffords'

debts resulted from long-term personal extravagance but it is also worth noting that all of the family's debts were paid in full by 1914⁸⁶.

Manchester City Council was seeking the acquisition of land for use as public parks to ameliorate the polluted and overcrowded conditions that were a consequence of the Industrial Revolution. While the City Council did not constitute an elite in the aristocratic sense, it was primarily composed of members of the professional classes who counterbalanced the decline in the numbers of business and mercantile representation, as Kidd has demonstrated⁸⁷. This is also borne out by Law's work which showed the continuing influence of members from occupational groups such as wholesale and retail merchants and professionals until 1903⁸⁸. Even with a later influx of independent and Labour councillors and those coming from occupations like trade unionist and draper, most members of the City Council continued to come from the professional class and may be said to have constituted an urban elite. The type of power they exercised was very different from aristocratic power, being based on consensus and negotiation rather than inheritance and social position.

However, the sales of aristocratic estates, for so long the symbol of the social and economic power of the landed class to the 'urban aristocracy' represented the transfer of that power and influence to the new urban elite. The complex negotiations for the purchase of Heaton Park illustrate the confidence of local authorities such as Manchester in dealing with the landed aristocracy and in securing the best possible deal for the city. The precarious financial position of the Wiltons made them vulnerable to the business acumen of the City Council members who were not afraid to press home their commercial advantages. The opening up of Heaton Park to the citizens as a public park

(one of the largest in Europe) increased the accessibility of the space but its use remained contested. The size of the park made it adaptable for diverse uses but the evidence available suggests that there was little consensus about how it should be used, by whom and for what purpose.

This paper has challenged the prevailing consensus that Manchester developed independently of the contiguous aristocratic landowners and has provided evidence that the mostly harmonious business relationships between these families and the municipality impacted on the ability of the city to develop new and existing resources. It complements the work of Young on Quebec and Montreal and Schafer on Edinburgh and Leipzig during similar periods.⁸⁹ It challenges the exclusion of a consideration of the relationships between local landed families in the vicinity of Manchester and the City Council and demonstrates that, not only did these relationships exist, but that they were approached with sensitivity and diplomacy and a lack of overt deference. This degree of co-operation emphasises the contribution to urban development facilitated by good working relationships between aristocratic families and the civic authorities. The ultimate consequence of these relationships in Manchester was the acquisition of Heaton Park as a public park for the city which continued to test the entrepreneurial skills of the City Council during the early decades of the twentieth century.

The timing of the purchase in late 1901 was not insignificant either. The beginning of the new century marked a time of renewed debate about the evolution of cities and their purpose. The provision of amenities for recreation and leisure was to become an important component of urban life and a new challenge for the civic authorities. The city was increasingly imagined as a social body whose future prosperity

depended on the health of each component part. This had the effect of emphasising the significance of the municipal authority as well as the community of individuals who made up the citizens. Both groups were to continue to jostle for position and status in the urban environment during the twentieth century.

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Table 1 – Assets and Liabilities of Manchester City Council 1893 - 1902

YEAR ENDING 31 MARCH	ASSETS	LIABILITIES	SURPLUS/ DEFICIT
1893	£15,437,129	£12,461,170	+ £2,975,959
1894	£17,419,613	£14,458,728	+ £2,960,885
1895	£18,260,340	£15,244,115	+ £3,016,225
1896	£19,056,840	£15,739,503	+ £3,317,337
1897	£19,844,732	£16,139,159	+ £3,705,573
1898	£20,734,248	£16,736,834	+ £3,997,414
1899	£21,523,196	£17,188,157	+ £4,335,039
1900	£22,300,001	£17,565,665	+£4,704,336
1901	£23,497,033	£18,608,660	+£4,888,373
1902	£25,138,146	£19,899,190	+£5,238,955

Source: Audited Accounts, Printed Proceedings of Manchester City Council 1892 – 1901

Table 2 – Final vote of the Manchester Parks and Cemeteries committee on the purchase of Heaton Park with party affiliation and ward represented, July 1901

FOR	AGAINST
Ward (Lib, Blackley and Moston)	Grantham (Cons, Crumpsall)
J Pollitt (Cons, Openshaw)	Evans (Lib, Medlock Street)
Ashton (Cons, Rusholme)	SC Thompson (Cons, Ardwick)
Ingle (Cons, St. John's)	Halliday (Lib, Cheetham)
Harrop (Lib, St. Clement's)	Shuttleworth (Cons, St. John's)
Johnson (Cons, Openshaw)	W Pollitt (Cons, Ardwick)
Birkbeck (Lib, New Cross)	Jones (Cons, Longsight)

Figure 2 – Map showing the acquisition of local districts by Manchester 1885-1931



Source: Alan Kidd, *Manchester* 4th ed. (Lancaster: Carnegie Publishing, 2006), 202.