

The Radical Campaigns of
JOHN BAXTER LANGLEY

A KEEN AND COURAGEOUS REFORMER

DAVID M. GEORGE

EXETER

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Cover image: portrait of John Baxter Langley by an unknown artist, c.1865. © David Slade

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Figure 1: Head and shoulder sketch of John Baxter Langley, c.1870 (Howell/8/83 Bishopsgate Library).

Introduction

John Baxter Langley (1819–1892) is a minor figure in the established political history of Victorian Britain. Although largely forgotten, even by scholars of radical history, he is representative of the many neglected men and women of the mid-Victorian period who sought fundamentally to challenge the mores of the world in which they lived. His activities and political contributions make up small, but important, components of many of the most significant political campaigns of the period. From tentative early steps as an educator in the Blackburn Mechanics' Institute and the Manchester Athenaeum, and as a writer, teacher and lecturer, he became an effective proponent of political reform both in Britain and abroad. Within Britain he sought the extension of the franchise through the Reform League; campaigned effectively with Josephine Butler for the repeal of the oppressive Contagious Diseases Acts; questioned the morality of Sabbath legislation; saw first-hand, at the Burradon Mining Disaster, the suffering that occurred through untrammelled industrialisation; and through the Miners' Provident Society and the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants sought its alleviation. He campaigned for prison reform and an end to public executions; he advocated the construction of improved housing, better sanitation and the extension of life insurance for the working classes. He also took an active role in political campaigns beyond the borders of his native country. As editor and owner of several newspapers, he opposed British military actions in the Second Opium War (1856–1860) and exposed acts of British brutality in the wake of the euphemistically named 'Sepoy Mutiny'. At considerable personal risk, he opposed slavery then existing in the southern United States and through direct action contributed in a small way to the demise of the regime that supported it: the Confederate States of America. He met with the Italian patriot, Giuseppe Garibaldi, shared a stage with Jessie White the Englishwoman who rode with his army, and organised opposition to cotton tariffs in British India.

Throughout his remarkable campaigning career, Langley's ultimate goal of taking a seat in Parliament eluded him. It was this failure to become an MP and a 'parliamentary radical', combined with the variety of his political activities, that has restricted Langley to the ranks of secondary or 'second tier' reformers. Educated but independent, many middle-class reformers of Langley's stamp have been overlooked because of their failure to fit neatly into one of the well documented and thoroughly researched manifestations of 'radicalism'. All radicals, as the term implies, aimed to change things by getting to the root of a particular problem. For the philosophical radicals it was a matter of better governance; for the Manchester School it was laissez-faire and free trade; and for the Chartists it was the attainment of better wages and conditions for working people by securing the right to vote. Each of these strands had run its course by 1850 but many of their central ideas were part of the intellectual inheritance of radicals such as John Baxter Langley.

The works of the 'philosophical radicals', for example, inspired many of Langley's political attitudes, but in some important details his political values diverged from, and even opposed, their agenda. This movement could trace its origins back to the earlier works of David Hume and Francis Hutcheson, but in the early nineteenth century it was represented by the works of Jeremy Bentham and father and son James Mill and John Stuart Mill.¹ Their belief, as famously outlined in John Stuart Mill's *Utilitarianism*, was that '[t]he creed that accepts as the foundation of morals, Utility or the Greatest-Happiness Principle, holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to provide the reverse of happiness.'²

Langley would have found much in this ethical viewpoint with which he sympathised—the abolition of the death penalty; the separation of church and state; gender equality; and the eradication of slavery. Mill, however, was a firm believer in the benefits of British imperial expansion. This was evident in his defence of the continuing appropriation of Indian principalities—Mill wrote that the annexation of Oudh ('Awadh') had been 'a criminally tardy discharge of an imperative duty'.³ Langley, in a *Morning Star* editorial declared: 'It is probable that there is nowhere on the face of the earth more grinding oppression on the one hand, or more hopeless misery on the other than that which prevails in our Indian dependencies.'⁴ A further difference was the means of achieving such goals, with the philosophical radicals seeking to influence the ruling elite rather than creating a genuine support base among the working classes.⁵

Although remaining influential among British radicals, this lack of a mass movement led to the philosophical radicals being overshadowed from the late

1830s and through the 1840s by the Manchester School of Richard Cobden and John Bright. The Manchester School rose to prominence through the Anti-Corn Law League and the successful campaign to repeal the protectionist Importation Act 1815 (55 Geo.3c.). With their initial goals achieved, Cobden and Bright continued to champion free trade and governmental withdrawal from the economy and the extension of the franchise. Langley shared a political platform with them during this period, but his goals diverged from theirs in particular ways. As Paul Adelman has pointed out in *Victorian Radicalism*, Bright sought an alliance with the working classes through the National Reform Union during the 1860s to oppose the vested interests of the aristocracy. But while he wished to extend the franchise, he viewed it as a privilege and believed that some were unworthy of it.⁶ Fellow radical George Holyoake reported that John Bright ‘was in for the extension of the franchise because it was a necessity—not because it was a right . . . He regarded the voter not as a man but as an elector—nor did he think it necessary that all men should be electors’.⁷ Bright also viewed voting as a purely masculine dispensation, writing: ‘I have little sympathy for that score or two of women who are miserable because they are not men.’ Langley saw the franchise as a universal right and argued for its granting to both genders. Other differences became apparent in the Manchester School’s faith that the untrammelled free market would not only improve Britain’s economic status but also act as a buttress against future military conflict. Cobden, for example, whilst supporting the rights of employees to negotiate their own working conditions, saw governmental legislation as an unwarranted interference in industry. Of the proposed Ten Hours Bill 1847, which regulated factory working hours and for which Langley was an ardent campaigner, Cobden declared, ‘Mine is the masculine species of charity which would lead me to inculcate in the minds of the labouring classes the love of independence, the privilege of self-respect, the disdain of being patronised or petted, the desire to accumulate and the ambition to rise.’⁸ Whilst Langley was active in the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants, Bright condemned trade unions, which he believed ‘were founded upon principles of tyranny and monopoly’.⁹ Such divergent opinion has led to middle-class and independent political radicals such as Langley remaining unnoticed in the history of major reform movements.

Similarly, although Langley came into contact with, and indeed worked alongside, many of the most prominent of the former Chartist leaders, he was a young man at the zenith of the movement’s appeal. The divergence between the non-violent ‘moral force’ Chartists such as Robert Gammage and their ‘physical force’ opponent Feargus O’Connor is detailed in the former’s 1855 memoir *History of the Chartist Movement 1837–1854*.¹⁰ Such self-justification is present in many of the

early accounts of the movement, although Malcolm Chase's *Chartism: A New History* (2007) and James Epstein's *The Lion of Freedom: Feargus O'Connor and the Chartist Movement 1832–1842* (1982) provided more dispassionate depictions.¹¹ Despite the movement's fractious internal disagreements, the clarity of purpose and working-class nature of the Chartists has provided a rich resource for social historians.¹² Links between the movement and later trade unionism have also been widely recognised. Margot C. Finn has emphasised the evolutionary connections between the Chartists and the First International and Marx's critiques of political economy, observing that 'socialist thought grew from the very soil of late Chartism'.¹³ Rohan McWilliam similarly cites the Marxist perspective:

Radicalism was the expression of the new working class, which became increasingly mature during the nineteenth century and proved able to develop its own institutions (trade unions) and eventually a new ideology (socialism) as it became increasingly class conscious.¹⁴

Like Chartism, the emergence of Victorian trade unionism has been a primary focus for social historians. It is a focus in which Langley—although an active participant—has been neglected. Whilst A.L. Morton and George Tate's work *The British Labour Movement, 1770–1920* advises that 'The story of the British working-class movement properly begins in the second half of the eighteenth century', and works such as J.L. and Barbara Hammond's *The Village Labourer, 1760–1832: A Study in the Government of England Before the Reform Bill* and *The Town Labourer 1760–1832: The New Civilisation* detail the history of pre-industrial workers' organisations, the combination of employer, governmental and legislative antipathy usually ensured that they were short lived.¹⁵ The history of struggle against such opposition by the more resilient trade union movement, seeking to unite previously fragmented rural and urban workers, the skilled and unskilled, the aristocracy of labour with the ordinary worker, is among the most inspiring in Victorian studies.¹⁶ A number of very useful overviews of this struggle exist, as well as numerous accounts of the birth of individual unions.¹⁷ Also available are collections of union records detailing the day-to-day workings of the fledging organisations.¹⁸ Biographies of prominent early socialists have been produced, notably those of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels; the most recent being Francis Wheen's 2012 study *Karl Marx*, and Tristram Hunt's 2010 biography of his compatriot Friedrich Engels *The Frock-Coated Communist*.¹⁹ However, biographical works also exist for individual union leaders, many of them Langley's contemporaries, such as Robert Applegarth,

George Odger, Joseph Arch and other radicals.²⁰ Langley's own contribution to the movement through his membership of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants is detailed in G.W. Alcock's *Fifty Years of Railway Trade Unionism*.²¹ But it is telling that this is the only occasion when his lifetime of political activism is mentioned in more than a cursory manner.

Langley's career spanned these two movements. As such, it has been overlooked. 'Until recently', admitted F.M. Leventhal in his biography of Langley's contemporary George Howell, 'these years have been regarded as a barren period in the history of the British labour movement.'²² In 'Working-Class Culture and Working-Class Politics in London, 1870–1900: The Remaking of a Working Class' Gareth Stedman Jones argued:

Standard interpretations of the period, from 1870 to 1914, have tended to concentrate on the great waves of trade union expansion, the growth of socialism, the foundation of the Labour Party, the conversion of the working-classes from liberalism, the demand for social reform and the beginnings of the welfare state.²³

Similarly, John Benson noted:

The first generation of labour historians concentrated their attention on the two major wings of the organised labour movement; they studied the efforts of the trade unions to protect the interests of their members' at the workplace; and they examined the attempts of the Labour Party to advance the working-class cause in the political arena.²⁴

This view has been reinforced by W.L. Burn's classic view of the period in *The Age of Equipoise: A Study of the Mid-Victorian Generation* that suggested that the anger of the Chartist years was replaced in the mid-century by consensus, stability and contentment.²⁵ Yet, a number of more recent studies have questioned the universality of this concord. John Stevenson's *Popular Disturbances in England, 1700–1870* provided examples of industrial and non-industrial conflict during the period in which the threat of violence remained an integral part of the protestors' arsenal.²⁶ David Kent's 'Power, Protest, Poaching and the Tweed Fisheries Acts of 1857 and 1859: "Send a Gunboat!"' detailed long-standing local disputes with authority, and he expanded upon the theme in 'Containing Disorder in the Age of Equipoise: Troops, Trains and the Telegraph' in which he suggested that the 'Age of Equipoise' could be equally

designated the 'Age of Unease'.²⁷ The years 1859 to 1867 saw endemic violence within the brickmaking trade; 1878 saw popular violence in the Lancashire Cotton Strike; there were riots in London over Sunday trading in 1855; riots over the presence of Garibaldi in 1862; and anti-enclosure protests such as those of Mousehold Heath between 1857 and 1884 and at Plumstead Common in 1876.²⁸ More recently, Martin Hewitt has pointed out that

the unanticipated reappearance of civil disorder on the streets of London during the 1866 Hyde Park Riots, created an unexpectedly sudden sense of disturbance, heightened by the collapse of Overend and Gurney in May 1866, trade union violence in Sheffield in the following October, bread riots in the East End of London in January 1867 and Fenian 'outrages' in England and Ireland that followed in the Spring.²⁹

That this work concentrates upon the career of a middle-class, seemingly respectable professional activist with ambitions of entering Parliament, but also explores the existence of hammer-wielding Tory electioneers, a mob of angry brothel keepers and the forced entry to Hyde Park in defiance of the police and military and the explicit prohibition of the Home Secretary, supports the revisionist notion that all was not so quiet and calm in Britain during the 'Age of Equipoise'.

Given this context, it seems that Langley, a middle-class radical, and the other reformers that he worked alongside have been seriously neglected, although some scholars have recognised that middle-class organisations were influential in the period after the decline of Chartism.³⁰ While the passing of the 1867 Reform Act has been praised as 'the decisive political event of the Queen's reign', and Disraeli's parliamentary tactics in advancing the Bill have been lionised, the Reform League that worked to ensure its passage has been less appreciated.³¹ 'Behind Chartism lay boundless, if inchoate dreams of social reconstruction', wrote Royden Harrison in *Before the Socialists: Studies in Labour and Politics, 1861–1881*, claiming that 'behind the Reform League lay little more than the expectation of "rising in the social scale"'.³² It has even been suggested that the contributions of middle-class reformers were counterproductive to working-class interests. Yet John Baxter Langley was a vocal proponent of both life insurance and friendly societies. He had seen the results of their lack during his medical career and as a witness to the horrors of the Burradon Mining Disaster. But Marxist doctrine would suggest that by promoting this self-reliance he contributed to the philosophy of 'self-restraint,

strenuous effort, perseverance, and courage in the face of adversity', which was the apotheosis of industrial capitalist propaganda. This, in turn, diffused the radical class identification needed to compel economic change.³³ Miles Taylor's *Ernest Jones, Chartism, and the Romance of Politics, 1819–1869* similarly views Chartist co-operation with middle-class reformers as deplorable. Langley is personally dismissed as one of 'the less likable figures in whose orbit Jones and Chartism were drawn'.³⁴ This is unfair. If the actions of Langley and those like him challenge the Marxist view of the period, it is because they acted in ways that were not in their own immediate class interest but in the interests of their fellow men and women. Langley was a man of his time and that time was between the decline of Chartism and the rise of socialism. It was a time of collaboration between middle-class reformers and working-class activists.³⁵ This collaboration covered a variety of campaigns, tending to lean to the radical side of Gladstone's Liberal Party. The partnership continued until late in the century when the emergence of socialism led to its decline. If neither a Chartist nor a socialist, Langley was a humanitarian; he worked tirelessly for what he believed to be the best interests of his fellow human beings, and the achievements of the men and women like him who *sacrificed* careers, respectability and both financial and personal security deserve better treatment.

It is equally true that in exploring the career of John Baxter Langley an insight into the lives of those who worked alongside him is also gained, and through this into the political organisations in which he was involved. Many studies of the mid-Victorian period have focused upon the actions of a single prominent individual; 'Josephine Butler and the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts', for example, or 'Robert Applegarth and the Trade Unions'.³⁶ The intertwining of the cause and its most recognisable figurehead relegates individuals of Langley's ilk to small supportive roles and their essential day-to-day work is passed over as inconsequential. But as Marx stated, 'How absurd is the conception of history held hitherto, which neglects the real relationships and confines itself to high sounding dramas of princes and states'.³⁷ Behind the figurehead there always stood a multitude of dedicated men and women pushing the movement forwards. Langley was an extremely conscientious example of such, addressing or chairing gatherings ceaselessly and when necessary attending several meetings in a single evening. But he was not alone in doing so. In the course of this research a number of names have regularly re-emerged: the Fenian, radical and sometime liability James Finlen; the freethinker and formidable speaker Harriet Law; and the noted microscopist and Reform League stalwart Henry James Slack, to name but three.³⁸ There is little information available on the lives of these activists and other than brief mentions

their exertions remain unrecorded. But in detailing the life of John Baxter Langley it is possible to acknowledge simultaneously the contributions of those who shared his concerns and, in looking beyond a movement's most prominent advocates, to view the nature of the organisation itself.

These insights are particularly pertinent in light of recent debate about the ultimate role of history. It is fifty years since E.P. Thompson sought to 'rescue the poor stockinger, the Luddite cropper, the "obsolete" handloom weaver, the utopian artist . . . from the condescension of posterity' and in the last thirty years there has been a concerted attempt to impose a more conservative perspective upon the historical discipline.³⁹ As it contains the highpoint of both British imperial aspirations and industrial power, nineteenth-century study is a particularly tempting area for such appropriation. The call for 'a return to Victorian values' by Margaret Thatcher, for instance, a woman who under those values would have been disenfranchised, is evidence of either a basic lack of understanding or a deliberate manipulation of the truth for political purposes.⁴⁰ 'Victorian values', Chancellor Nigel Lawson later explained, had been reduced to 'free markets, financial discipline, firm control over public expenditure, tax cuts, nationalism . . . privatisation and a dash of populism'.⁴¹ The 'Victorian values' (Gertrude Himmelfarb preferred the term 'Victorian virtues') used to legitimise a policy of radical economic modernisation, replete with virulent anti-trade union legislation and 'a systemised redistribution of wealth, regionally from Scotland, Wales and the North to South East England, and in monetary terms from poor to rich' were not the values espoused by men such as Langley.⁴²

Similarly, Langley, as editor of Joseph Cowen's *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, was a fierce critic of Britain's assumed pre-eminence and imperial ambitions. Such opinions would find little attention in the current government's re-evaluation of the history syllabus. Prime Minister David Cameron stated that his desire was to show 'our island history in all its glory', while Secretary of State for Education Michael Gove claimed that Britain had been 'a beacon of liberty for others to emulate' and future students would be taught to 'know about the achievements of heroes and heroines so that they can take pride in what these islands have achieved'.⁴³ Such overtly nationalistic statements have not been without their critics. Simon Schama scathingly argued that 'History is not about self-congratulation. It is not really about chasing the pedigree of the wonderfulness of us'.⁴⁴ On 17 August 2013, more than 100 teachers wrote to the *Independent* newspaper complaining that the proposed syllabus breached their legal duty forbidding 'the promotion of partisan political views in the teaching of any subject in school'.⁴⁵

‘Michael Gove’ commented Steven Mastin, ‘talks about the heroes and heroines of Britain’s past. Clive of India is in there. To whom is Clive of India a hero? Certainly not to India. This is a curriculum for white British citizens, people like me.’⁴⁶

Indeed, one might ask whether the long-ago conquest of a far-away province was of more relevance even to modern white British citizens than the provision of adequate food, healthcare, education or the struggle for suitable housing. It is difficult to imagine these and similar issues being high on the governmental agenda and thus large sections of British history would be overlooked. Would there be room in the curriculum for the study of Catholic emancipation, the fight for a free press, the battle to extend the franchise, to improve working-class housing and confront the social issues that encouraged prostitution?⁴⁷ That Langley was involved in all of these campaigns is proof of his continued relevance and recent attempts to expropriate nineteenth-century history show that his contributions are in danger of being lost.

A biography of Langley is therefore particularly fitting. Within his lifetime the genre achieved a level of popularity that rivalled that of fiction. But with few exceptions these were panegyric works designed to inspire emulation and bearing titles such as *The Great Triumphs of Great Men*.⁴⁸ This is true even of Langley’s associates within the radical community.⁴⁹ But as Virginia Woolf noted, ‘The majority of Victorian Biographies are like the wax figures now preserved in Westminster Abbey, that were carried in funeral processions through the street—effigies that have only a smooth and superficial likeness to the body in the coffin’.⁵⁰ Although an election pamphlet of 1867 gives useful details of his early life, Langley did not achieve the political or economic distinction required for such works and the complexity of his personal life and eventual fall from grace prohibited such elevating historiography.⁵¹ But the nature of biographical study has evolved. Although Langley’s personal life would have excluded him as a subject of a nineteenth-century biography, it does not do so today. As Barbara Caine pointed out in *Biography and History*, the moralistic panegyric has been replaced by a broader and more inclusive view of emotional and sexual identity.⁵² Moreover, as Langley’s career was often in the background of major events, and spanned a large number of issues rather than a single, prominent cause, it would be difficult to imagine another format that could adequately portray the importance of his contributions.

Although no biographical work can claim to illuminate all aspects of its subject’s existence, the omissions in studying Langley became quickly apparent. Despite being a prolific writer, his poetry, plays and prose betray little of

his emotional feelings. Correspondence between Langley and other radicals has illuminated his role in political affairs, and even provided proof of his friendships, but none relate to matrimonial or domestic matters. Although official records tell of his separation from first wife Mary Atkinson and cohabitation with Sarah Anne Roberts, there has been nothing to detail the reasons or circumstances of the marital breakdown. Where such matters are discernible it is through fragments: a maudlin line in a poem, a suggestion of dissatisfaction in an editorial, or an aside in a letter that largely discusses politics. The evidence for Langley's relations with his children is in a similar vein: his daughters attended political meetings with their father, often providing musical accompaniment; his son Geoffrey wrote to local papers in his defence during his fall from grace—both of which suggest a level of respect and affection. But once again, no direct communication is available. The most promising source, a letter from his granddaughter Clara, disappointingly said of Langley, 'If you don't know of his sins, we will draw a veil over them'.⁵³

In contrast there is a large and varied collection of newspaper material. Langley was both a contributor to and an editor of several liberal papers. Beginning with the *Stockport Mercury*—where under his pen name 'A Man in The Streets' he wrote a series of scathing satirical attacks on local politicians—to an editorial role on the *Preston Guardian*, the *Morning Star* and finally the *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*. He was also the proprietor of two formerly Chartist newspapers, the *London News* and the *People's Paper*. In all of these there are articles, comments and editorials by Langley. From these, not only are his ethical and political beliefs visible, but his personal likes, dislikes and mocking sense of humour are clearly discernible. Less personal but still useful were numerous reports in non-affiliated, and frequently antagonistic, metropolitan and provincial newspapers. Often a number of these were needed to fully uncover the details of an event.⁵⁴ Also accessible were the journals of the individual organisations with which Langley was involved, including the *Liberator*, the *Free Sunday Advocate*, the *Railway Service Gazette*, the *Shield*, the *Musical Times*, the *Kentish Mercury*, the *Woolwich Gazette*, the *Oddfellows Magazine* and the *National Sunday League Chronicle*. The records of these organisations were also in many cases accessible: the accounts and minute books of the Artizans', Labourers' and General Dwellings Company, of which Langley was chairman, were held at the archives at Lambeth; those of the Reform League at the Bradlaugh Library, Bishopsgate; and records of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants at the University of Warwick. In a career as varied as Langley's, it is perhaps unsurprising that letters and other ephemera also came from a wide variety of sources: letters from the Huntingdon Library, California;

the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections at Rochester University, New York; the University of Iowa Special Collections Department; the International Institute for Social History, Amsterdam; the National Co-operative Archive, Manchester; Edinburgh University Library Special Collections Department; and the Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums.

Given the dearth of personal sources and the abundance of political ones, this work focuses, as indeed did Langley, for most of his life on the social and political campaigns of the period.

Notes

- 1 John Plamenatz, *Mill's Utilitarianism Reprinted with a Study of the English Utilitarians* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1949) p. 2.
- 2 John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism* (London: Parker, Son and Bourn, 1863) pp. 9–10.
- 3 Lauren M.E. Goodlad, 'Geopolitics', in Martin Hewitt (ed.), *The Victorian World* (London: Routledge, 2012) p. 183; Jennifer Pitts, 'Legislator of the World? A Rereading of Bentham on Colonies', *Political Theory*, vol. 31, no. 2, 2003, pp. 200–34.
- 4 J. Baxter Langley, 'Editorial', *Morning Star*, 14 June 1857.
- 5 The complete writings of John Stuart Mill are available as *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 2006). See also *John Stuart Mill: Autobiography* (London: Penguin Classics, 1989). The ongoing 1968–2006 project *The Collected Works of Jeremy Bentham* (London and Oxford: Athlone Press and Oxford University Press, 1968–1983) replaces John Bowring's *The Works of Jeremy Bentham* (Edinburgh: William Tate, 1842), which excludes Bentham's religious writings and is considered by many to be flawed. In addition to their written works, many studies have looked at Utilitarianism in its individual aspects, Robert E. Goodin, *Utilitarianism as a Public Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); David Lyons, *Rights, Welfare, and Mill's Moral Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994). See also James E. Crimmins, *Secular Utilitarianism: Social Science and the Critique of Religion in the Thought of Jeremy Bentham* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990); David Lyons (ed.), *Mill's Utilitarianism: Critical Essays* (Lanham MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997); Eileen P. Sullivan, 'Liberalism and Imperialism: J.S. Mills's Defense of the British Empire', *Journal of Ideas*, vol. 44, no. 4, Pennsylvania, October–December 1983; Joseph Hamburger, *Intellectuals in Politics: John Stuart Mill and the Philosophic Radicals* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 1965).
- 6 Paul Adelman, *Victorian Radicalism: The Middle-Class Experience, 1830–1914* (London: Longman, 1984) pp. 5 and 39. See also John Bright, *The Life of the Right Honourable John Bright: A Popular Biography* (London: Routledge, 1889).

- N. McCord, *The Anti-Corn Law League* (London: Routledge (Reprint) 2013); N. McCord, 'Cobden and Bright in Politics', in R. Robson (ed.), *Ideas and Institutions of Victorian Britain: Essays Presented to G. Kitson Clark* (London: Barnes and Noble, 1967); D. Read, *Cobden and Bright: A Victorian Political Partnership* (London: Edward Arnold, 1967); W. Hinde, *Richard Cobden: A Victorian Outsider* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987). The most recent work is that of Conservative MP Bill Cash, *John Bright: Statesman, Orator, Agitator* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2012).
- 7 George Jacob Holyoake, *Sixty Years of an Agitator's Life*, vol. 2 (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1892) p. 578.
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The Early Years of John Baxter Langley

In 1819 the Reverend John Langley, curate of the Church of St Chad in Shropshire, and his wife Martha announced the birth of a son, John Baxter. He was the fourth of five children.¹ Commonly known by his middle name—Baxter—he was to become a prominent reformer and radical activist through the mid to late nineteenth century. There was little in his early upbringing to suggest this would be the case. By all accounts, John Langley—Baxter’s father—was a popular local clergyman, relatively wealthy and highly educated. At Oxford University he was to receive a BA in 1823 and an MA in 1826.² Befitting his occupation, he was also a highly religious man, a founding member of the British and Foreign Bible Society (which distributed scripture within both England and the colonies) and a secretary of the Church Missionary Society for Africa.³ Baxter’s Uncle, the Reverend Daniel Baxter Langley, was similarly employed and—having received a doctorate of law from Cambridge—had been appointed as the Vicar of the Parish of Olney and the headmaster of a small private school. He was also the author of several notable ‘fire and brimstone’ tracts, such as *Eternal Punishment; or, the Worm that Never Dies. A Serious Address to Young People* and *The Destruction of Earthly Hopes: A Solemn Reason for the Cultivation of Heavenly Affection*.⁴

This vocation was a family tradition and Baxter was later to state that ‘he had been intended for the Church’.⁵ To this end, he and his brother Thomas were educated at St John’s School in Sherborne, Dorset. This was another highly religious environment. The Headmaster, the Reverend Ralph Lyon, was a Doctor of Divinity and boasted that ‘his first thought and care was to bring up the youth committed to his charge in the nurture and admonition of the Lord’.⁶ Such instruction clearly influenced Baxter’s brother Thomas Langley who, after studying at Oxford and Trinity College, Dublin, and receiving a BA in 1844, continued the family tradition by gaining an appointment as a curate in Nottinghamshire.⁷

Despite its pious nature, Baxter's childhood was by no means narrowly focused and at the family home in the village of Meole Brace, the Reverend John Langley received a remarkably wide-ranging selection of visitors. The anti-slavery campaigner William Wilberforce (1759–1833) whom he knew from the British and Foreign Bible Society was said to be a frequent guest.⁸ Other family friends included the Bishop George Selwyn (1809–1878) who brought 'two young Maori chiefs from the little known land of New Zealand' and the 'first coloured Bishop of Africa' Samuel Ajayi Crowther (c.1809–1878), also visited the Langley home.⁹ Such guests undoubtedly had a profound influence upon Baxter, none more so than Charles Darwin, whose father Robert (1766–1848) was the family physician.¹⁰ That the Darwins were welcomed indicated a high degree of religious tolerance within the Langley household. They were not only known to be Unitarians, but Susannah Darwin (1765–1817) was also a daughter of the prominent dissenting Wedgwood family.

Life for the young Baxter changed in June 1825 with the death of his mother.¹¹ Said to be 'a very handsome man' the Reverend wasted little time and remarried barely a year later to a widow, Mary Emma Andrews.¹² As had been the case with the Reverend Langley's first marriage, there was a considerable inheritance involved.¹³ Mary had been born into the wealthy family of the Kinchants, who could trace their ancestry back to Huguenot stock. The Langleys similarly claimed to be descended from King Edward III.¹⁴ Shortly after the 1827 wedding, the family left St Chad and moved to St Mary's and St Leonard's-cum-Scotwell Church, Wallingford, where the Reverend John Langley took the position of Rector. He was to remain there for the remainder of his 46 years.¹⁵

Baxter had an unhappy relationship with his new stepmother. His granddaughter Edith later detailed her belief that 'he would not have been a black-sheep if the second Mrs Langley had been kinder'.¹⁶ Perhaps in part due to this unhappy home environment, Baxter began to assert his independence and reject the family's expectations of an ecclesiastical career. He was—he wrote of the profession—in possession of 'an ineradicable dislike to its duties as well as a want of belief in its doctrines'.¹⁷ It is likely that he was also involved with the radical creed of Unitarianism from an early stage: in addition to the family's close relationship with the Darwins there was a large Unitarian chapel situated in Shrewsbury only a short walk from his former home in Meole Brace. By 1854 Baxter was certainly of this faith.¹⁸ To repudiate publicly the orthodox faith in such a way would have required considerable courage, especially in a family as steeped in Anglicanism as the Langleys. It also showed the beginnings of political and class awareness. The congregations at chapel were made up

largely of the lower-middle and working classes. Those of the established church were of the wealthier classes and the Anglicans maintained their social exclusivity—for example, by the insistence that teaching fellows at both Oxford and Cambridge swear allegiance to the Anglican articles of faith.¹⁹

Instead of ecclesiastical pursuits, Baxter elected to study medicine. Initially this was under the noted physician Dr Cowen of Reading.²⁰ Having trained in France, Cowen was a controversial figure and was said to have challenged many of the accepted medical opinions of the time. Clearly a gifted student, Baxter then attended King's College, London, where he took honours in 1839, coming first in his class in natural history and third in chemistry.²¹ At the newly opened Leeds School of Medicine, he again distinguished himself with the silver medal for botany and in 1842 he passed the examination of the Royal College of Surgeons. Fully qualified, he then found employment in Blackburn, Lancashire.²²

Whilst studying medicine, Baxter also became increasingly interested in music and performance. He had been composing poetry from at least 1837 and was also to write several plays, novels and a political satire.²³ On occasion this involvement in the arts was something that he would probably have wished to forget. In 1839, for example, he attended a choral society meeting in Leeds.²⁴ Appalled by another participant's lack of musicianship (a cloth manufacturer named Thomas Womack), Baxter had an anonymous note delivered. The note requested that Womack 'be so kind as to not play'. Correctly guessing the note's origin, Womack confronted Langley the following week and, brandishing a horsewhip, pursued him through the streets of Leeds. The following day Langley demanded that Womack meet him at the nearby Woodhouse Moor to obtain satisfaction.²⁵ Declining, Womack instead printed and distributed a leaflet:

Run away, a fine poodle dog puppy, with a small quantity of long brown hair around the neck. The above puppy ran away on Thursday evening last, in consequence of having received a severe horsewhipping from his master, and was last seen near the infant school, Park Lane, Leeds, barking and snarling but had not the courage to bite. He will, if pleased answer to the name of L-n-g-l-y, and may easily be distinguished from others by having a strong sense of smell of garlic—is perfectly harmless and may be horsewhipped with immunity. Any person bringing the above to the large stone building, bottom of Park Row, will be handsomely rewarded.²⁶

It was during his time in Blackburn that the beginnings of Langley's social activism first became visible. At the time of Baxter Langley's residence, Blackburn was undergoing a bitter and prolonged industrial conflict. Between 1846 and 1848 the *Blackburn Standard* later reported that 'Wage disputes were of daily occurrence, and their sequel, strikes of larger or lesser dimensions, became the recognised order of the day'.²⁷ Langley was reported to have taken 'an active part' in the campaign for a ten-hour day, which was then being vigorously fought for in the area.²⁸ Further political action took place in 1844, when an old music hall was suggested as the site of a Mechanics' Institute at a cost of £15 per year.²⁹ Langley had been involved in such organisations (probably at Shrewsbury) since around 1839.³⁰ Much of the education to be provided was vocational and sought '[t]o interest the operative in the principles of his employment, and teach him to understand them at the least possible expense'. A further goal—more in keeping with Langley's political principles—was 'to encourage the acquisition of general knowledge, and the study of literature and science among all classes of the community'.³¹ At a time when illiteracy within the Blackburn area was so widespread that 'barely 39 men and 11 women per hundred are able to sign their own name', the Blackburn Mechanics' Institute was an immediate success.³² Reported as being 'in contemplation' in March 1844, by the end of April that year it had 201 subscribers and Langley—acting as Secretary—had announced the first series of lectures.³³

Langley was to become a vocal spokesperson for both literary and lecturing institutions, culminating in his efforts to remove the restrictions imposed by the Sabbatarian movement on such activities on the one day of free-time available to most working men and women (see Chapter 6). Addressing the Governmental Committee on Libraries in 1849, he reported:

I have seen members of mechanics' institutes occupy very much higher positions in society in consequence of having had these opportunities of improvement. Many individuals in different parts of the country, both agricultural and manufacturing districts have risen from the lowest occupations to hold high and responsible positions.³⁴

He was also to take a direct part in such education and become a successful lecturer on a variety of subjects. In 1849, for example, Langley lectured at the Sheffield Athenaeum on 'The Genius of Charles Dickens', and in 1853 he used the Blackburn Mechanics' Institute as a forum for a discourse on childrearing entitled 'The Golden Rule practically applied for the Middle and Industrious Classes'.³⁵ In 1854 he gave a lecture to a party of Whitsunday excursionists

from John Relly Beard's Unitarian Bridge Street School, and in 1857 he waited on Home Secretary Sir George Grey (1799–1882) as part of a delegation from the Society for the Removal of Obstacles that Existed Towards the More Extensive Diffusion of Knowledge.³⁶ He was also—reported the *Bristol Mercury* as 'a gentleman who has long been connected with Sunday Schools'.³⁷

Although policy within the Blackburn Mechanics' Institute forbade the 'introduction of party politics, controversial theology or sentiment having an infidel or immoral tendency', it was through his membership that Langley came into contact with the area's political radicals. One of these, William Billington (1825–1884), was both a founding member and—at the time of Langley's involvement—employed as a grammar teacher within the organisation.³⁸ Billington acted as an adviser to local trade unionists; was a 'public denier and assailant of . . . religious belief' and was also a talented poet, writing primarily in the Lancashire vernacular. Much of his output was highly political in nature, 'The Golden God', for instance, from his collection *Sheen and Shade* was an undisguised attack upon the nature of industrialised capitalism:

Oh! This is a steam-born and iron-bound age
Of factories and foundries, of gold and gain,
Of prisons and workhouses—Want's heritage!
Of railways and rivalry, paupers and pain,
Of printing and preaching, and men who mortgage
Their souls to serve Mammon, the God of the age!³⁹

Billington was likely to have influenced Langley both politically and poetically. Similarities in style are clearly visible, as with Langley's own composition 'Come along!'⁴⁰

The shade creeps forward on the dial;-
Come along!
The hour approaches for the trial
Whether wrong
Leagues with might
Shall conquer right,
Or claims of justice brook denial;-
Come along!

The flag of liberty unfold
Come along!

Who wishes to be free, be bold,-
 In purpose strong!
 For bright and high
 The orient sky
 The light of freedom streaks with gold;-
 Come along!⁴¹

Although never achieving widespread recognition, Langley was later to declare that ‘some of my happiest hours have been spent in composition and that in tribulation and distress the habit of writing has ever been of great comfort to me’.⁴² By 1854 Langley was confident enough of his ability to perform in front of an audience—as at a meeting of the [Manchester] Mutual Improvement Society—where there was singing and dialogue accompanied by a pianoforte with one of Langley’s own compositions garnering ‘universal laughter and applause’.⁴³

The success of the Blackburn Mechanics’ Institute, combined with several testimonials vouching for the ‘unwearied zeal and arduous labours’ that Langley had contributed, led to an appointment in January 1846 as Secretary to the Manchester Athenaeum.⁴⁴ This was a prestigious position. The Athenaeum had 2,005 members, a library of more than 11,000 volumes, a gymnasium, alongside chess, fencing and debating societies.⁴⁵ There had been between 300 and 400 other applicants for the role of Secretary and the salary was a considerable £150 a year.

The Manchester Athenaeum was far from a radical institution and catered to a more genteel middle-class audience than the Blackburn Mechanics’ Institute. During its 1843 Grand Soiree, for example, the chief attraction was the attendance of Charles Dickens, and the following year Benjamin Disraeli was the guest of honour.⁴⁶ In fact, Disraeli, alongside his compatriots in the ‘Young England’ movement, Lord John Manners (1818–1906) and George Smyth (1818–57), had in October 1844 selected the Manchester Athenaeum to testify to young artisans as to the impact of their movement. The evening had been a triumph, selling 3,176 tickets, and resulting in Disraeli receiving nine rounds of applause. Langley could do little to change this political environment, especially without the presence of working-class reformers of the likes of Billington. In fact, Langley found himself unable to make any changes to the Athenaeum and was to complain that he was:

A man who came to Manchester expecting to be manager of the Institution (having been seven years in connection with such

institutions), and then found himself placed in the position of a mere menial clerk.⁴⁷

Furthermore:

Upon more than one occasion, when matters which he believed were left to his care, or which affected his vital interests, were discussed he was excluded from the Board.⁴⁸

Conversely, the Directors and Honourable Secretary saw Langley as a subordinate and believed that—in asserting his opinions so overtly—he was forgetting his place. Within months of his appointment Langley was officially chastised for leaving the building without the prior permission of the directorate.⁴⁹ Langley maintained this was a spurious complaint, especially as he had at no time been allowed the opportunity to defend his actions.

On the occasion in question Langley had left the Athenaeum and travelled to Blackburn ‘on most important business, involving a loss to him of £200’.⁵⁰ He had felt little concern over his absence as he had, during his application to the Athenaeum, stated that this would on occasion be required. The Board’s Chairman, Thomas Edwards, had assured him that ‘it is unnecessary troubling yourself, if you are here in the morning’.⁵¹ Whilst in the process of leaving the Athenaeum, however, Langley had been accosted by another director—a Mr Greaves—anxious to ask him some questions. Despite ‘remonstrating that he was in a great hurry’, this conversation had resulted in his missing his train. Being thus prevented from concluding his business he had instead travelled to Blackburn the following morning, finalised his business affairs during the day, and returned to Manchester at 6.30pm that evening. Langley’s absence had, however, been noted. A disciplinary meeting was called for 13 August 1846—without Langley being informed or invited to attend—and a formal motion was passed:

Mr. Langley had not conducted himself with suitable respect to the members of the Board, and the superior officers of the institution; that he had been very irregular in his attendance at the institution . . . that he had made use of his office for private purposes . . . and that it was the opinion of the Board that such conduct was reprehensible and that it could not be tolerated in future; and that notice be given to Mr. Langley that, if persisted in, in future, it would lead to his dismissal.⁵²

Further conflict emerged in regard to the organisation of the Athenaeum's presentations. As a respectable middle-class institution, the majority of the speakers and performers engaged at the Athenaeum were apolitical. The first lecture following Langley's appointment, for example, was a recital by Henry Philips of Charles Dibden's patriotic *Songs of the British Navy*:⁵³

Here, a sheer hulk, lies poor Tom Bowling,
The darling of our crew;
No more he'll hear the tempest howling,
For death has broach'd him to.
His form was of the manliest beauty,
His heart was kind and soft,
Faithful below, he did his duty, but now he's gone aloft.⁵⁴

But Langley wished the Athenaeum to take a more controversial part, particularly in regard to Mancunian affairs and, when reformist speakers were hired, he was often found to be a supporter of their principles. On 8 May 1846, for instance, the Unitarian lecturer George Dawson (1821–1876) spoke on behalf of the Manchester and Salford Early Closing Association. By September Langley was lecturing in Salford on the same topic. Similarly, on 4 October 1846, the woman's activist, Clara Lucas Balfour (1808–1878), gave a series of lectures entitled 'Women and Society'. Within four months Langley was in attendance of the Annual General Meeting of the Manchester School of Design. Here he echoed Balfour's concerns by proposing:

That it is expedient and desirable to form female classes in connection with this school and that the council for the ensuing year be requested to take the matter into their early consideration in order that such classes may be opened at the commencement of the coming quarter.⁵⁵

The Athenaeum's Board of Directors frowned upon such lectures and their general dissatisfaction with Langley was compounded given that Langley had the misfortune of assuming the role of Secretary at a time of severe economic downturn. The year 1847 saw the Athenaeum declare a deficit of £404.⁵⁶ Debate was heated between Langley and the directors in regard to the best means to rectify this situation, with matters coming to a head at the following year's Annual General Meeting. James Crossley (1800–1883), acting as Chairman, admitted that the Athenaeum had 'suffered in common with every

other institution dependant for its support upon the state of prosperity in the district'.⁵⁷ In response a number of directors suggested that the way to regain financial sustainability was to greatly diminish, or discontinue altogether, lecturing as:

The attendance is seldom such as to justify the expense; and this is more mortifying when other and more valuable departments of the Institution suffer in consequence.⁵⁸

To replace the lectures, they advocated producing 'a series of vocal and instrumental concerts, of a popular character'.⁵⁹ Further savings were proposed by reducing expenditure on the Athenaeum's library, especially in the purchase of novels.⁶⁰ The Chairman himself remarked:

He did not object to novel-reading, provided it was practised judiciously, and sparingly; but the best reading was that which fitted a man to perform his duties as a man and a citizen and to raise him in the trade or profession to which circumstance had devoted him.⁶¹

Langley was appalled. To remove the educational aspects of the Athenaeum was, in his opinion, to remove the very reasons for its existence. Counter-assertions were made at the meeting by John Fisher—a supporter of oratory—who pointed out that the request calling for George Dawson to speak had been signed by 155 members yet had been received 'most uncourteously, ungenerously and was met, one might almost say, with a direct untruth' (the untruth being that the lecturers had already been booked and so Dawson could not be engaged).⁶² Careful reading of newspaper reports of the meeting reveals the presence of two organised and prearranged factions among those in attendance. Langley, Fisher and a number of supporters stood in defence of public speaking; the Directors in opposition. Furthermore, it had been Langley who had presented the requisition for George Dawson to speak and who had been treated with discourtesy. But the directors desired to control not only the number of lectures but also their content. Dawson's lectures had, despite the Board's reluctance to employ him, been very well attended. Yet the Unitarian had not been recalled for a second series of talks, despite an additional and similarly supported request having been submitted.

Further controversy had resulted from a tour by the American speaker Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882). Emerson had questioned established Christian doctrine with claims such as:

Man wheresoe'er thou seest him, in brothels, gaols or on gibbets,
is upon his way upward to all that is good and true.⁶³

The Reverend Hugh Stowell, rector of Christ Church, Salford, furiously protested to between 3,000 and 4,000 attendees of the thirty-seventh annual meeting of the Manchester and Salford Auxiliary Bible Society, advising them to disrupt any similar meeting and warning that

The clergy and ministers of Manchester would warn their Sunday School teachers and all Christian parents against the subtle and disguised iniquity of such sentiments; they would lift up their voices against the poison being circulated under the veil of literature.⁶⁴

This was raised at the Athenaeum meeting, and while the Chairman deplored the methods that they had used, he did little to refute their complaints:

He was sure that the directors would look with the utmost care to anything that was uttered within those walls that could be justly offensive to the most scrupulous attachment to religious truth; and he thought that if those reverend gentlemen had, instead of publicly attacking the institution, communicated privately and kindly with the directors, they would have been more to effect a salutary reform, and would not have endangered the damaging of a valuable institution.⁶⁵

An opposing director, Charles Swallow, went further by claiming:

Lecturers had been allowed to take a latitude to which they were not entitled to according to the rules of the institution, it became them, as they valued its permanent existence, to see that those religious questions which all held sacred, should be respected within its walls.⁶⁶

A long and ill-tempered debate followed, during which the Directors continually raised complaints about Langley's conduct as Secretary. Minutes of the August 1846 disciplinary meeting were read aloud to the audience. One attendee even demanded that this be done by Langley himself. Contesting the fairness of the censure, Langley attempted to validate his position by reading a private letter that he had received from the former

Chairman, Thomas Edwards, which had itemised the duties and responsibilities that had been promised. The meeting voted that disclosing the details of such a confidential communication was improper. One member, H. W. Capes, declared:

He must tell the members of the Athenaeum, that if they sanctioned such conduct in a public meeting, he could no longer subscribe to the institution.⁶⁷

Langley had been outmanoeuvred by men with far more experience in office—or, in this case, Athenaeum—politics than he had. With no official authority and subordinate to a hostile Board of Directors, he had little choice but to hand in his resignation.

This sudden unemployment was of considerable concern, as during the time of his residence in Manchester Langley had both married and started a family. Although details of Langley's personal life are scarce, we know that on 4 May 1846 he was married to Mary Agnes Atkinson 'a minor spinster' of Poulton-le-Sands (one of three villages that, between 1850 and 1890, combined to create the town of Morecambe). It does not appear to have been a long engagement. At the time of their wedding Langley was 27 and Mary only 17 years of age.⁶⁸ As their first child was born in December of the same year, we can assume that Mary was pregnant at the time of the ceremony.⁶⁹ Langley's granddaughter Edith later reported:

he took the marriage ceremony so lightly that he put the cigar he was smoking down in the church porch as he went in and picked it up and continued smoking it when he came out.⁷⁰

The only record that we have of Mary's thoughts are taken from *The Housewife's Receipt Book: A Guide To All Matters Connected With Household Economy*. Published in 1854 this was a domestic instruction manual with Langley contributing a number of medicinal remedies. He was also responsible for the introduction to the volume, which consisted of both he and his wife supplying their recipe for a happy marriage. Langley's was:

Take of punctuality, cleanliness, and cheerfulness, as much as you can secure; add a strong belief in good motives when anything offends, and let the ambition to make tart replies stand till it is quite cool. Flavour strongly with unwavering love and truth, and

having grilled the tongue upon the fire of patience, serve up with a smile, without sauce. Ready forgiveness is the most graceful ornament, and is sure to be appreciated. N.B.—if the weather be rather stormy, silence is a valuable addition, and will be found to relish.

This prescription is infallible, and if generally used will secure for its inventor the name with which he was long associated—A Family Friend. J.B.L.⁷¹

Mary produced a similar formula:

Take of remembrance of the mistakes of female education one drachm; of patient love a hundred ounces. From business habits scrape all late hours, and wash off all false pride of man's lordship. Let misunderstandings simmer, but never boil over, and carefully throw away the scum and froth till the whole is quite clear. Sweeten with agreeable conversation and sympathy, and garnish with tender regard for home interests. Some professional men throw in a spice of ambition; but it is apt to produce fermentation, and is often found to be pernicious. N.B.—No secrets should on any account be introduced into the above. M.A.L.

Given the similarity of language used, it seems unlikely that Mary was genuinely involved. Similarly, taking into account the conventional treatment of male and female areas of domestic responsibility ('Man is the bread winner; woman the bread-maker; each sex has its sphere'), it is more likely to have been a financial endeavour on Langley's part rather than a genuine depiction of the couple's marital relationship. From what we know, in reality it does not appear to have been a happy union. Langley was rarely at home, attended meetings several times a week and Mary was never reported to accompany him, even when these occasions were of a social nature. When not at meetings or demonstrations, Langley often worked late into the evening. In March 1856, for example, he wrote an editorial condemning Home Secretary Spencer H. Walpole for his refusal to grant clemency to convicted murderer William Bousfield (1827–1856):

What his [Walpole's] feelings are at this hour—at the hour which we write,—at the hour, perchance, when he is laying his head upon his pillow—we shudder to contemplate.⁷²

Although Langley was never to speak of his marriage in public, a poem published in the *London News* in 1858 perhaps gives an indication of his true feelings towards his wife:

This love is a wearisome thing
 The root of each sigh, tear and sorrow;
 Why can't we be merry and sing,
 Without any thought of to-morrow?

Like the pinna, who opens her shell,
 In the hope of obtaining protection
 From the crab who enters to dwell,
 And pinch her for her affection, -
 We open our hearts to young cupid,
 Who enters, and makes a sly grin
 Before we discover how stupid
 To let the young monkey creep in.

I gathered a rose in a dream;
 Of its beauty—not thorns—I was thinking:
 I was wounded, and then with a scream
 Saw Cupid beneath it was winking.
 His arrow was tipped with a prickle
 While he laughed 'neath the beautiful flower;
 Alas! I have been in sad pickle
 Since my wound in that terrible hour

This love is a wearisome thing,
 The root of each sigh, tear and sorrow,
 Why can't we be happy and sing,
 Without any thought of tomorrow?⁷³

Despite this, the couple were to have five children: Mary Agnes Elizabeth Atkinson Langley, Mary Jane Martha, Anna Milton, John Geoffrey Chaucer and William Shakespeare (died in infancy).⁷⁴ If Langley was a neglectful husband, there is nothing to suggest that he was a poor parent. His daughters were often present at political soirees and, at times, provided musical accompaniment. Similarly, Langley's son was later to defend his father's reputation by writing to the papers that

whatever may have been his indiscretions, [he] has always been a tender and loving father and a considerate and generous friend.⁷⁵

Through Langley's early years we can see the beginnings of his future life of campaigning. He had rejected both his family's religion and their desire that he follow an ecclesiastical path in order to follow the more socially progressive faith of Unitarianism. He had trained for—and then eschewed—a career in medicine, and having received a prestigious appointment in the middle-class and respectable Manchester Athenaeum, had railed against the restrictive authority therein and fought to impose his own agenda. The lessons he had learned at the Athenaeum he was to put to good use later in his career. His most successful endeavour had been his work establishing the Blackburn Mechanics' Institute. This was designed to aid those of a less educated and affluent background than his own. This was to become the pattern for much of his political campaigning. In the immediate future, however, he had a family to support and he was forced to commence upon a new career, initially in lecturing and then, more earnestly, through employment with the *Stockport Mercury* newspaper.

Notes

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- 8 Ray Brodie (ed.), 'Punjab Pioneers', ch. 3, (unpublished Memoirs of Edith Rayner, John Baxter Langley's granddaughter), message to author, 5 June 2011, email; 'Religious Intelligence—Public Meetings Lately Held in London', *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine*, vol. 1. Series 3, 1822, p. 386; 'Ludlow—Bible Society', *Berrow's Worcester Journal*, 19 August 1854.
- 9 Brodie, 'Punjab Pioneers', ch. 3: 'Letter From Clare to Great-Uncle Charlie', p. 2.
- 10 Keith Thompson, *The Young Charles Darwin* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2009) p. 20.
- 11 'Died', *Berrow's Worcester Journal*, 30 June 1825.
- 12 Clara Slade, 'Letter to Great-Uncle Charlie', p. 2.
- 13 Details of the inheritance can be found in Leeds Archives/WYL1012/AA10 Will of Thomas Bolland, 1819. This was the cause of some family litigation between the Kinchants. Court records of the dispute 'Langley v Kinchant/deposition/1831' are at the National Archives, Kew, NA/C 13/3025/11.
- 14 Slade, 'Letter to Great-Uncle Charlie', p. 2.
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- 17 J. Baxter Langley, 'Preface', in *A Literary Sandwich: Being a Collection of Miscellaneous Writings* (London: John Darton & Co., 1855) p. vi; A Member, *A Brief Biography of J. Baxter Langley*, p. 3.
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- 38 Lewis, *The Middlemost and the Milltowns*, p. 259.
- 39 William Billington, *Sheen and Shade: Lyrical Poems* (Blackburn: J.N. Haworth, 1861) p. 103.
- 40 Langley, 'Go on!', in *A Literary Sandwich*, p. 4
- 41 Langley, 'Come along!', in *A Literary Sandwich*, p. 3.
- 42 *Ibid.*, 'Introduction', p. vi.
- 43 'Tea Party', *Manchester Times and Gazette*, 8 March 1854.
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- 74 Maria Jane Martha Langley, 24 December 1848, 'England Births and Christenings, 1538–1975' <<https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/NTNB-RMR>> [accessed 11 July 2013]. Anna M. Langley, 1861, England and Wales Census, 1861, index, *FamilySearch* <<https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/M7FL-KTF>> [accessed 11 July 2013]. John G. Langley in entry for Mary A. Langley, 1871, 'England and Wales Census, 1871', index and images, *FamilySearch* <<https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/VRNL-MM5>> [accessed 11 July 2013]. Family history suggests the couple argued over the naming of the children. Mary wished them to be named after family relatives, Langley after eminent figures from literature. In this, at least they compromised with Mary choosing for the first two and Langley for those born afterwards.
- 75 G.J. Langley, Letter to the *Woolwich Gazette*, 11 August 1877.

A Radical Voice, 1848–1858

Having left the Manchester Athenaeum, Langley began his career as a lecturer. Although perhaps lacking the prestige of his former occupation, it was no less rewarding financially and was to lead him into a long career as a radical journalist and editor. This profession allowed him both to combine and consolidate his political and ethical beliefs and to come into contact with many of the most famous and successful reformers of the period. This would influence his own career and in later years inspire his own unwavering campaign to represent the seat of Greenwich. From his early and unsubtle commentaries on local politics in the *Stockport Mercury* he was, by the time he left the *Morning Star* in 1858, well versed in a wide range of issues and among the most active participants in many of the radical campaigns of the day.

Through his interaction with the visiting lecturers at the Manchester Athenaeum Langley had garnered sufficient experience and confidence to become a public speaker. In 1849 he testified to the Committee on Public Libraries that ‘a good lecturer was able to make between £500–1000 per annum’.¹ His subject matter was varied and allowed him to both affirm and develop his own political ideology. At an 1853 meeting of the members and friends of the Oldham Reform and Free Trade Association, for example, he covered many of the beliefs that were later to spur him into political campaigning.² These included the links between political change and social reform, the need for improved housing, the law of supply and demand in relation to trade unionism and wage demands, ‘the evil of giving any creed the arm of civil power’ and the ‘absurd inequalities of the present electoral arrangements’. International politics were also addressed, including the Turkish question; the history of the Ottoman Empire; revolutionary activity in China; and the need for a British policy of non-intervention; before Langley mentioned the case of Miss Cunningham, a missionary who had recently been imprisoned whilst evangelising in Tuscany. Whilst in no way defending the laws under which she

was arrested, he believed that 'if she wished to travel in Tuscany she must recognise the laws thereof'.³ Knowing that 'Lectures on Literature are most popular', he supplemented his political oratory with literary subjects such as 'A Celebration of the works of Robert Burns'.⁴

But although Langley's lectures were usually well attended, a far greater audience could be reached through the medium of newspapers. In 1848 the first chapter of his fictional melodrama 'Recollections of the Hospitals' was published in the journal of a large friendly society the *Oddfellows Magazine*.⁵ More importantly, Langley was offered the role of editor of the magazine. This was to be a very short-lived arrangement: after only one issue the magazine ceased publication. The organisation had raised a substantial amount of money to aid Irish men and women impoverished by the 'Potato Famine'. This money had, however, been deliberately withheld by the society's Secretary William Ratcliffe (1813–1870). A special meeting was called and Ratcliffe was removed from office. As part of the subsequent reorganisation, and despite a letter from Langley being read requesting the magazine continue publication, a ballot resulted in only sixty-three delegates voting for its continuance with seventy-three voting against.⁶ As was often the case this was a financial setback for Langley who, in an attempt to prove the viability of the magazine, had paid for the last issue from his own pocket.⁷

Despite this setback, in 1848 Langley soon afterwards accepted the post of editor of the *Stockport Mercury*. Established only eight months earlier, the *Mercury* was a traditional Liberal paper, proclaiming 'The perfect independence of the *Stockport Mercury* will recommend it to the Liberals of all parties, as the most appropriate vehicle of public opinion'.⁸ The paper primarily covered local news with, much being political in nature. The other Stockport broadsheet the *Stockport Advertiser* or, as Langley described it 'The Stockport Sheet of Extracts', had been in publication since 1822.⁹ It espoused the 'interests of agriculture and commerce and the principles of the Church of England' and was essentially a Tory organ.¹⁰ With such different positions vituperative attacks on one another soon appeared in both papers and Langley was inevitably drawn into partisan local conflicts. These were based largely around the actions of Stockport Town Council. The Liberals of Stockport, despite having made up the majority of council members for some fifteen years, were disunited and could not match the financial and political advantages enjoyed by their resurgent Tory opponents. In 1848 they had been unable to prevent the post of Mayor, held by a Liberal for the previous two years, from falling to the Conservative magistrate Major Thomas Marsland. Two of the first stories covered by Langley clearly demonstrate the corrupt nature of the political

machinations in common usage. Shortly after Marsland's mayoral victory a court action was commenced by the proprietor of the Three Boars' Heads public house for non-payment of debts.¹¹ Marsland had entertained between sixty and seventy people at an election meeting at the public house. During the course of this he had frequently asked attendees, 'Hands up for gin, hands up for brandy, hands up for whisky'. The landlord reported that 'Hundreds of glasses' had been consumed. At the end of the evening the bill, despite being made out to a fictitious 'George Fowler', had not been paid.¹²

A similar, if somewhat more serious, story the paper covered was the so-called 'Election Rioters'.¹³ On 15 April 1848, during the same campaign a Conservative agent, Elkanah Cheetham, and a publican, Thomas Sutton, had been 'bottling' a local voter, William Waller, at the Red Bull public house.¹⁴ Waller, who had gone with the men 'reluctantly' on the pretext that his brother owed the landlord money, was a known Liberal voter and coercive pressure was used to make him change his allegiance. A group of Liberal supporters, hearing of the affair, sought to rescue their comrade, and marched to the public house to demand entrance. They were met by Sutton who was armed with a fire poker. Although initially beaten off, they returned at midnight to break windows, force open the door and assault several people within. Seven men were later arrested and tried on 19 August 1848 on a charge of Riotous Assembly.¹⁵ Three of the accused, Daniel Wooley and the brothers Owen and Charles Robinson, were found guilty and sentenced to three months imprisonment. It was clear to Langley that the trial had been held improperly and the verdict influenced by the politics of those involved. Both defence lawyer William Vaughn and the prosecutor William Reddish were known to be Tory sympathisers. Although all three accused had well-attested alibis, one having been at a wedding party on the night in question, Vaughn had failed to call any witnesses. Nor had he cross-examined any witnesses for the prosecution. Langley's paper called the affair an example of 'Tory malevolence' and Vaughn's failures 'whether by an error in judgement,—sufficient to destroy his reputation as an acute attorney, or whether by wilful error,—sufficient to destroy his reputation as an honest man'.¹⁶ Further resentment was inspired when a memorial, bearing the testimony of those whom Vaughn had failed to call, was presented to the court. The magistrate, the same Major Marsland accused of non-payment of debts, refused to accept the memorial, considering it to be 'beneath the dignity of the bench'.¹⁷ When the men were finally released the church bells were rung, a parade met them at the station and the following week there was a tea party at which both Langley and the *Stockport Mercury* were officially thanked for their support.¹⁸

Although Langley wrote editorials concerning the ten-hour movement and the dangers of cholera to Stockport, his main focus—and that of the *Mercury*—remained local politics. Shortly after Langley's arrival, fourteen town councillors were due to retire by rotation, twelve of them being Liberal and only two being Tories.¹⁹ The election to replace them left the council likely to fall to the Tory faction. In an editorial of 31 August, Langley complained that Stockport Liberals had 'no rallying point, no recognised or trusted leader, no organisation'.²⁰ The Conservative Party, in contrast, was both well funded and professional. In the lead up to the election they put forward numerous legal challenges regarding voting privileges. William Royle, a known reformer, owned a pipe-making business and rented a shop (where he lived) and a workshop at well above the £10 per year requisite for voting privileges. A small footpath ran between the two, however, which could be used by one other workman. This, the Tory solicitor successfully claimed, made the two properties separate and thus Royle was declared ineligible. Such manoeuvres, the Tory *Stockport Advertiser* gleefully informed its readers, 'indicated a clear *gain* to the Conservative Party of 64!'²¹

A front organisation, the 'Stockport Working Man's Ratepayers Association' (SWMRA) also held a series of meetings accusing the Liberal-run council of extravagance. Whilst claiming 'the consideration of Whig, Radical or Tory must now give way to considerations of pounds, shillings and pence', Langley was in no doubt that this organisation was made up of 'Paid agents of the Conservative Association'.²² Indeed, as he noted, all of the men that the SWMRA chose to support—Abraham Unsworth, Joseph Middleton Wright, Samuel Bann, George Marshall, Jeremiah Rice and Samuel Howard Cheetham—had been ratified beforehand by the local Conservative organisation. Liberal reaction was slow and disorganised. On 18 September, for example, one Oliver Jackson attended a SWMRA meeting and 'interrupted the speaker at every other sentence'. He did so, however, as a lone individual and before the conclusion of the meeting he had been unceremoniously thrown down a flight of stairs.²³

The Tories, both inside and outside the SWMRA, centred their attacks upon the Liberal Town Clerk, Henry Coppock.²⁴ This was clearly a role of considerable influence and Coppock had held the appointment since 1836. Well informed and unafraid to speak his mind, he had been on several occasions a thorn in the sides of local Tories. When councilman and future mayor Mr Alderman Marshall had attempted to enforce Sabbatarian legislation and prosecute locals who had hired out a boat on a Sunday, it had been Coppock who had stated categorically that no law was being broken.²⁵ He had then

proceeded to read aloud all relevant legislation. Marshall had complained, somewhat petulantly, that ‘the reading of such laws as those could be productive of no good whatever. He did not wish any more laws to be read.’²⁶ Local Tories were to have their revenge in 1842 when a Conservative pamphlet, *A Terrible Disclosure*, released by the SWMRA, joined a constant stream of vilification by the *Stockport Advertiser*. This suggested gross extravagance and personal corruption by the Town Clerk. An extremely large salary of £500 per annum and rapid increases in taxation were cited:

Borough expenditure in 1837 was	£2442.4.4
Borough expenditure in 1847 was	£3330.3.2
Improvement expenditure in 1837 was	£2336.3.8½
Improvement expenditure in 1847 was	£6355.6.0
Sundries in 1837 were	£2.16.10
Sundries in 1847 were	£219.5.3 ²⁷

Such figures were misleading. On 6 October, Langley printed in full a refutation from Coppock that explicitly detailed council finances.²⁸ Much of the expense had been in relation to three bills of improvement and the 1838 purchase of a gas works. This had proved more expensive than foreseen when several local mill owners sought to have their premises illuminated at public expense and a protracted legal battle had ensued.²⁹ All of this information his accusers were well aware of. Claims of Coppock’s remuneration had similarly been exaggerated.³⁰ The £500 per annum was Coppock’s expenses not his salary. He employed two junior secretaries who were paid from the money. It also included payment for a second role as Clerk to the Magistrates. His actual wage for both positions was less than half of that claimed by his opponents. Despite such protestations of innocence, it seems clear that the constant accusations convinced many Stockport residents. Coppock himself admitted that he had lost public trust and George Wood, a Liberal and local wag, interrupted one meeting to decry a recent outbreak of potato blight: ‘The cause was, no doubt, Henry Coppock. (Laughter)’.³¹ Langley, under his pen name ‘A Man in the Streets’, expanded upon this joke and suggested that the Tory councillors might

move for an enquiry whether the late Town Clerk, Henry Coppock, did not produce the French Revolution, fill the butcher’s stalls with large blue flies, and cause the burning of the Ocean Monarch.³²

When Coppock held a meeting of his own and invited his accusers to attend and debate his supposed extravagance, not only did his Tory critics fail to attend but, to diminish his audience, they immediately announced a rival meeting.³³

Whilst the *Mercury* was clear in its political affiliation, it nevertheless maintained remarkably unbiased reports of local and national events. The paper, and Langley, even received a vote of thanks from the SWMRA for the detailed coverage of its meetings.³⁴ But in addition to his editorial duties, Langley produced a series of ‘letters’ under the pseudonym ‘A Man in the Streets’. This was a common practice amongst newspapers of the time and such aliases had been used increasingly to suggest a publication spoke with ‘the voice of the people’.³⁵ Within these missives was observable not only Langley’s personal animosity towards the Stockport Tory luminaries but also his humour and *schadenfreude*. Positioned on the front page they provided a satirical and mocking commentary on local events. The first, published on 8 September 1848, for instance, described his encountering en route to a council meeting:

A gentleman with a very red face—I should think he was an Alderman and if he wasn’t he ought to have been.³⁶

The meeting itself had

the aspect of a juvenile debating society, where everybody tries to speak as often as possible and as much as possible without any care whether they speak to the point or whether there is any point to speak about.

By employing such humour, ‘A Man in the Streets’ sought to expose the numerous acts of individual greed, corruption and hypocrisy then being committed by the local Tories. In this Langley was unflinching, sarcastic and unceasing. Elkanah Cheetham, who had been responsible for the arrest of the ‘Election Rioters’, was in September 1848 brought before a magistrate for failure to pay a workman on his estate. This had been an honest mistake, explained ‘A Man in the Streets’, as

Elkanah Cheetham was accustomed to get work people out of the [poor] union, and employ them in his factory. This he did, of course, for the public good and without any regard to the savings

he which he made in his expenditure by employing unfortunate people at low wages . . . he had no idea of personal benefit—Not he!

From that moment on, Langley proposed, the motto of the town council should be ‘Cheat’em and Refuse to pay’em’.³⁷

It is clear that through this acerbic commentary, the paper’s spirited defence of Henry Coppock and the constant exposure of the Tory council members misadventures, Langley became a source of considerable irritation for the Tory council members. In October 1848, shortly before the council elections, they struck back. A large number of placards and leaflets were posted around Stockport that not only exposed Langley as ‘A Man in the Streets’ but also accused him of a chequered and highly defamatory background.³⁸ Prior to his arrival in Stockport, the placards claimed, Langley had made his living by traversing the country with ‘strolling players’ and ‘Ætheopian serenaders’.³⁹ He had (apparently) been rejected by the Royal College of Surgeons, and been accused of financial improprieties at the Manchester Athenaeum. Most malicious was the claim that, due to Langley having ‘abjured Christianity’, his father the Reverend Langley had ‘shut the door against’ his son. This was not only vindictive but was also untrue (in 1858 Langley was to campaign for the establishment of a school in Preston and received a donation of 12 guineas addressed to ‘My Dear Son’ and signed ‘Your Affectionate Father’).⁴⁰

Langley was quick to respond. The next column from ‘A Man in the Street’ accused the proprietor of the *Advertiser* and three Tory councillors of being responsible. The level of untruth in the accusations showed that ‘The dog is returned to his vomit and the sow to her wallowing in the mire.’⁴¹ He added:

I have traced the affair out, and I know from where this dirt is thrown. It is the sweepings of the Tory newspaper offices of Stockport . . . Messrs Lomax, Jerry Royce, [Samuel Howard] Cheetham of the Lancashire watch box, or [Elkanah] Cheetham of the gas economizing propensities.⁴²

Langley, acting as editor, similarly denied the leaflet’s claims:

My father’s door was never shut against me; nor did I ever traverse any part of the country with strolling players, nor with Ætheopian serenaders. I was never rejected by the Royal College of Surgeons. My Diploma I place in your hands for inspection, with a copy of an

essay which won a prize in King's College. I also produce a silver medal and several other prizes, as proof that I was not a likely person to be rejected.⁴³

Lomax, proprietor of the rival *Advertiser*, denied any responsibility for the placard's origin but in doing so gave further credence to the accusations made against Langley. As at the Athenaeum, Langley had been outmanoeuvred. Despite his disavowals, it was now common knowledge that he was 'The Man in the Streets' and this ended the column's effectiveness. Boasting better organisation and financial backing than the Liberals, and with both Langley and Town Clerk Henry Coppock compromised, the Stockport Tories could look forward to a sweeping victory.

The final column by Langley's alter ego was a prescient one. Entitled 'A vision of a future meeting of our council, which will take place when the Tories are in power'. There followed a detailed caricature of every prominent Stockport Conservative, replete with personal mannerisms and references to previous behaviour.⁴⁴ An example being that of Elkanah Cheetham, who was—at least according to the 'Man in the Streets'—a heavy drinker:⁴⁵

Enter: Mr Elkanah Cheetham as mayor, decorated with a sham gold chain (which will have been freshly gilded at the expense of the town),

The Mayor (Speaking rather thick): Gentlemen, I—I—I am the Mayor, I—I—I yes, gentlemen, I'll show you how it is done. I will *so*. (great sensation) I intend to buy up all cheap coals that are offered to the—yes—all the coals that are offered cheap—too cheap to be good—at Lord Vernon's coal stay. I intend to buy them with—with—the yes, what was I saying Mr Town Clerk Reddish?—(in a whisper) just send out for a quarter of ale.⁴⁶

The election proved as devastating a blow as Langley had feared. The Tory candidates gained ten of the fourteen contested places; the only ward in which they did not make gains being the Liberal heartland of Heaton Norris—known by the Tories as 'The Refuge of the Destitute Ward'.⁴⁷

The first move by the new council was to remove Henry Coppock from his position as Town Clerk.⁴⁸ Embarrassingly, however, they found an impediment to removing him similarly from his position as Clerk to the Magistrates. At the request of Alfred Orrell, a Liberal Magistrate who had since died, the Lord Chancellor had appointed five new magistrates to Stockport, the majority

of them Liberal. These supported the retention of Coppock. By employing their own candidate, George Wilkinson, as Town Clerk while continuing to pay Coppock his original salary, the Tory ‘economists’ were forced to immediately increase council spending.⁴⁹ To rectify this Wilkinson and Councillor S.H. Cheetham travelled to London to present the Lord Chancellor with a memorial claiming that the new magistrates were not needed and had been requested ‘for private and personal objects’.⁵⁰ Later that day, Lord Stanley, a Tory spokesman in the House of Lords, made a speech in which he insinuated that the deceased Liberal magistrate, Alfred Orrell, had died as a result of *delirium tremens*. Quite reasonably, Langley concluded that Stanley had been fed this information by the Stockport delegation. As a surgeon, he also knew that *delirium tremens* meant that Orrell had died due to ‘the *immediate* effects of alcohol’. Langley was furious at this manipulation of the truth for political ends.⁵¹ They had, he believed, ‘crammed Lord Stanley with falsehood and venom’.⁵² Worse still, ‘not satisfied with an exhibition of spleen against the living’, the councilmen had ‘condescended to make a tool of his Lordship in the propagation of a *lie*, insulting the memory of the dead’.⁵³ The anger expressed by Langley, though perhaps justified, put him firmly beyond the realm of acceptable editorialising. The following week, the paper reported that Langley had been dismissed and distanced itself from his article:

We are sorry that the leading paragraph in last week’s Mercury, had a being. [*sic*] What apology the writer of it, who was then editor, would make, we know not; but we are inclined to think that he penned the savage article without having read Lord Stanley’s speech in the House of Lords, as his lordship did not abuse the character of the late Alfred Orrell, Esq.⁵⁴

It seems likely that the misrepresenting of Stanley’s speech was merely the excuse needed to end his employment. The *Mercury*’s stated goal was to be ‘the most appropriate vehicle of public opinion’.⁵⁵ Langley’s increasingly vitriolic editorials and attacks on the Tory councillors and the *Stockport Advertiser* made the paper too radical to be such. The politics he espoused were equally uncompromising. On 1 December 1848, for example, he commented on an editorial in the *Advertiser* regarding the Anglo-Sikh War. Lomax, though a Christian, had ‘forgotten the principles that religion professes to espouse’ and British government policy had doomed the British soldiers involved to perpetual damnation:

Two thousand three hundred human beings fighting under English *consecrated* banners were sent—unprepared to—we dread to say where. Could they say they ‘loved their enemies?’ Had they prayed for them that despitefully used them? Did no angry passion deform their spirit as it fled hence to the tribunal of the GOD of LOVE? It is horrible to think of the future of these poor wretches, who have so furiously raged together.⁵⁶

Following Langley’s departure, the *Mercury* took a different and a far more conciliatory line. Rather than the unpalatable suggestion that British soldiers were damning themselves to Hell, it reported that at the Battle of Goojerat:

The Sikhs fled in one disordered mass, and our brave countrymen pursued them mid-day until dusk. Guns, men, ammunition, camp, baggage, and provisions, were all left as spoil for the victors. The conquest was rapid and complete.⁵⁷

In the wake of his dismissal Langley returned to lecturing, speaking on subjects as diverse as the plays of William Shakespeare to ‘The French Invasion Panic’.⁵⁸ He also published much of his poetry, including *The Nightingale* with music by G.A. Macfarren (1813–1887), an extremely accomplished musician who was in 1883 to receive a knighthood.⁵⁹ During this period he also began attending electoral reform meetings, a pastime which was to lead him inevitably to activism with the *National Reform League*.⁶⁰ It was eight years before he returned to the world of newspapers. When he did so it was not to a small, provincial paper specialising in local politics but to a larger and more ambitious project. The *Morning Star* and its sister paper the *Evening Star* were launched in March 1856 as northern-based rivals to the London press and, particularly, to *The Times*.⁶¹ The proprietors of the paper were the veteran anti-corn law campaigners and members of Parliament John Bright (1811–1899) and Richard Cobden (1804–1865).⁶² Both were outspoken radicals, eloquent, renowned and both had successfully stood for Parliament (Bright in Manchester in 1843 and Cobden in Stockport in 1841). Also involved was the anti-slavery campaigner Joseph Sturge (1793–1859).⁶³ Sturge was a peace activist, advocate of suffrage reform and a supporter of infant and Sunday schools, many of the causes Langley was himself to espouse. In such an environment Langley was free to express his political beliefs without fear of censure. Rather than editor, Langley was employed as General Manager. Through his association with the *Morning Star* and with veteran agitators such as Cobden, Bright and Sturge we

can observe Langley's move from a localised satirist and writer towards a full-time role as a political activist.

Langley would undoubtedly have met, and admired, his employers before he was considered for the post. In March 1850, for instance, as delegate for Newcastle-on-Tyne, Langley had attended a reform conference at Crosby Hall, Bishopsgate. Among the speakers were both Bright and Cobden.⁶⁴ In 1853 he had attended a number of lectures organised by the 'Peace Conference Committee' with regards to the crisis in the Near East (that eventually led to the Crimean War). Both Cobden and Bright were prominent members of this organisation.⁶⁵ Cobden also had links to the Manchester Athenaeum and, having been elected as MP for Stockport in 1847, would have been aware of Langley's work on the *Mercury*.⁶⁶ Also prominent on the *Morning Star* was the Reverend Henry Richards with whom Langley had in 1853 shared a stage when both spoke on the subject of 'The Non-productive character of military spending—showing the fallacy of supposing it to be beneficial to a country'.⁶⁷ The very radicalism that saw him dismissed from the *Stockport Mercury* led to his employment on the *Morning Star*. The stated goals of the paper were to support 'the extension of commerce, the better reward of industry, the reduction of that taxation which presses heavily on working people, the progress of popular freedom, and the proper administration of public affairs' but primarily, as it proudly proclaimed in its inaugural issue, that of 'PEACE, RETRENCHMENT, & REFORM'.⁶⁸

What made Langley especially suitable was that, although the *Stockport Mercury* had made overt criticism of British military policy, it was not a single-issue publication nor was Langley himself widely known as a spokesperson for the peace movement. The proprietors were aware that the *Morning Star* needed to be more than an extension of existing anti-war publications. Cobden had written to Bright advising that, 'If it be an expansion of the *Herald of Peace*, it will never be established as a newspaper'. He further advised, 'I should be inclined to say that it would be as well not to have a too enthusiastic peace man as its managing director'.⁶⁹ Given Langley's previous influence and journalistic experience, it is safe to assume that he contributed both in tone and in penmanship to the new paper. As General Manager rather than Editor, however, it is often difficult to ascertain the extent of his direct involvement. This is especially true, as men of similar convictions, for the first time, surrounded him. Two contributions to 'A Man in the Streets' are certainly his work and from these a distinct improvement in style is observable. The first, published on 18 March 1856 (the second issue of the paper) was a far cry from the blunt satire of the *Stockport Mercury*. In polite and well-balanced prose, it complained both

of dishonest employment guarantees and, perhaps more importantly, of the paper that carried them:

SIR—For the last six or twelve months a series of advertisements have appeared in the *Times* and other morning papers, inducing females to believe that by paying one guinea for lessons in leather work &c., constant employment may be secured. I, and my friends, having tested these professions by paying our guineas, have found ourselves without employment. Can you not expose this trading in the misfortunes of females who are willing to work, and who pay their guineas with the hope of having the privilege of getting their own living in an honourable manner?

You will be a STAR of hope to many if you will deal with such subjects—I am, Sir, wishing you success, yours obediently.⁷⁰

His second contribution, detailing an infamous London murder, showed similar improvements in writing style and was worthy of the respectable 37-year-old manager of a major daily newspaper.

Despite its progressive outlook, the *Morning Star* was in many ways an unbiased source of news. Regular sections included ‘The Money Markets’, ‘Trade’, ‘City News’, and included human interest stories such as ‘The Suicide of Capt. Brown, late of the 22nd Fusiliers’, ‘Fearful railway collision’ and ‘Potatoes—only a moderate amount of home grown potatoes have come to hand since our last report’.⁷¹ What made the paper unique were the causes that it took up, often of a nature unlikely to gain it admirers, and the compassionate manner with which it treated its subjects. An early exposé, for example, detailed the neglectful death of Charles Seddon, a 25-year-old convict aboard a Thames prison hulk. The same issue bemoaned the fate of juvenile female prisoners denied access to a reform school.⁷² Even the singularly reviled crime of child desertion could be described sympathetically and without condemnation. Ann Burton, the paper reported, had abandoned her baby in a shop doorway. When brought before the Lord Mayor she reported that upon becoming pregnant she had lost her employment as a servant. Facing destitution she had taken her baby and with ‘no food to give it she had wrapped it up carefully, and placed it in the yard, so that some kind person might find it and save it from starvation’.⁷³ A note had been pinned to the child’s shawl promising that when her financial situation improved Burton would return to claim it and she had waited to ensure that it had been found by a passer-by. The manner in which the paper detailed the case encouraged the reader to identify with Burton, and to feel

contempt for the judge who coldly informed her ‘You have offended, not only against the law of the country, but against the laws of humanity’ before sentencing her to two months in prison. Such empathy towards the lot of working-class women was to become a characteristic of Langley’s political beliefs, expressing itself most notably in his work alongside campaigner Josephine Butler (see Chapter 7).

A similar connection between Langley’s private and professional activities can be seen in the trial of William Palmer, the infamous ‘Rugeley Poisoner’. Palmer had been convicted of murdering John Parsons Cook, a wealthy associate, with strychnine. The prosecution maintained that this was only the latest in a string of financially motivated killings, including those of his wife and brother. They were, however, unable to give details of the poisons that he was alleged to have employed.⁷⁴ Palmer admitted purchasing strychnine but claimed that there was an innocent explanation; namely, that it was to kill a number of dogs that had been worrying his horses. Further evidence against him was extensive but circumstantial. He was undoubtedly a heavy drinker, an inveterate gambler and, at the time of Cook’s death, had been in severe financial difficulties. In his defence was the fact that no strychnine had been found in Cook’s body and his symptoms had not indicated strychnine poisoning. Thus, Palmer’s conviction depended upon the prosecution’s unproven claim that strychnine ‘once ingested, dispersed [and] was destroyed’. On 10 June 1856 Langley—an avowed opponent of capital punishment—addressed a meeting at St Martin’s Hall calling for Palmer’s execution to be delayed.⁷⁵ Rather than maintain Palmer’s innocence, Langley stated that ‘as there remained doubt over Palmer’s guilt, that the Judges summing up unfairly insinuated that Cook had died by strychnine when this was not proven’. Consequently, Palmer would be ‘executed in order to prove a scientific hypothesis’. Despite protests, Palmer was executed, and 35,000 people braved inclement weather to watch his death.⁷⁶ Langley’s personal reservations in regard to the death penalty were mirrored by the editorial policy of the *Morning Star*. It was, in fact, one of the paper’s major crusades. But rather than claiming innocence or misgivings over a conviction, the paper defended those who were undoubtedly guilty. The backgrounds of prisoners were investigated, their demeanour in the stand described and the method of their demise given in great, and often horrific, detail. In doing so, it encouraged sympathy even with known murderers and juxtaposed their frailty with the clinical lack of humanity shown by the authorities.

An example of this was the case of William Bousfield, upon which the paper reported extensively in early 1856. Bousfield had been employed as a solicitors’

clerk. On 9 January 1849 he had married a woman named Sarah Jones. The couple were, to all accounts, happy and had three children, Ann, Eliza and John. Neighbours later described Bousfield as 'a kind husband and a gentle and attentive father'.⁷⁷ His employers, however, had not been informed of his intention to marry and upon discovering the fact he had been summarily dismissed. Thereafter he was forced to work door to door as a French polisher. On 3 February 1856, Bousfield entered Bow Street police station and admitted to having stabbed his wife with a chisel. Upon investigation, his home—at 4 Portland Place—was found to contain not only the body of his wife but also those of his three children. When Bousfield was informed of this he 'endeavoured to beat his brains out against the wall crying "Kill me, kill me"'. Later, he again sought to end his life by throwing himself headfirst into the fire in his cell, receiving horrific injuries on the neck and lower face. At his committal he said nothing in his defence, even refusing to give his name. He was described as being too weak to stand and with no attempt to deny his crimes he was sentenced to death by hanging.⁷⁸

This weakness continued and on the day of his execution Bousfield was again in a 'state of apparent utter prostration', would not speak and showed no understanding of his impending death.⁷⁹ Four prison guards were forced to drag him—two taking his shoulders and two his legs—towards the scaffold and when this proved insufficient he was tied hand and foot to a chair. The executioner, William Calcraft, favoured the 'short drop' method. This involved the victim falling as little as 3 feet and often failed to break the condemned prisoner's neck, resulting in the much slower death by strangulation. Calcraft was known to entertain crowds by swinging theatrically from the accused's legs to quicken their expiry. Such was his notoriety that a popular ballad had been written detailing his incompetence, and on the day of the execution the gangland friends of one of his former victims—The Kent Street Roughs—had promised to shoot the executioner if he dared show his face on the gallows.⁸⁰ Calcraft, in 'a state of nervous terror' had hurriedly placed the noose around Bousfield's neck, pulled the trapdoor lever and left without ensuring that the hanging had been successful. The paper's description of Bousfield's death was as shocking as it was distressing and, while doing little more than report the facts, clearly established and justified its opposition to capital punishment.

Unharmd by the 'short drop', Bousfield had 'raised himself upwards by sheer muscular strength' and wedged his feet against the right side of the gibbet, thus preventing strangulation. With Calcraft absent a prison guard eventually dislodged Bousfield's legs but he had then swung to the other side of the gallows and repeated the feat, again preventing his death. A third attempt, even after Calcraft returned, proved equally unsuccessful. Eventually

the condemned man had been dragged from the scaffold and his legs were tied together. Even with this precaution, Bousfield struggled convulsively for several minutes before finally he expired.⁸¹

The *Morning Star*, having established sympathy with a man who had clearly lost his mind, and shown every bungling cruelty of the state's retribution, then refuted the oft-cited claim that such brutality acted as a deterrent to others. Rather than view it as a warning the crowd (said to be 4,000 to 5,000 strong) constituted 'hardened and callous villains, who look[ed] upon an execution as a spectacle especially fitted for their gratification and recreation'.⁸² Singled out was a boy about 12 years old, who proudly boasted to a reporter that this was 'the fourteenth fellow he had seen *tuck'd up*'.⁸³ The real means of preventing crime, the paper concluded, was not the ritualised killing of broken men such as Bousfield but the provision of education for the working poor and an increase in wages sufficient to allow children to attend school rather than work in factories or fields.⁸⁴ The campaigns of the *Morning Star* were to become the campaigns to which Langley would devote his life.

Through such campaigns Langley, and the *Morning Star*, attempted to challenge the 'sophistries, half-truths and all the artifices of a declamatory rhetoric' employed in particular by *The Times*. There was a natural animosity between the two papers. *The Times* had campaigned strongly to prevent the repeal of the 'Tax on Knowledge' that allowed the founding of the *Star* and its contemporaries.⁸⁵ Mowbray Morris, manager of *The Times*, warned a Select Committee that he had 'very little opinion of the sagacity of uneducated people'. He furthermore thought it important that 'the production of newspapers should be limited to a few hands and be in the hands of parties who are great capitalists'.⁸⁶ A further cause of resentment was that Joseph Sturge, the largest shareholder in the *Star*, had in 1842 stood unsuccessfully against Tory candidate John Walter, proprietor of the rival paper, for the seat of Nottingham. Walter had won by a narrow margin of 1,835 votes to 1,801, but later investigations revealed that he had expended nearly £4,000 in bribes.⁸⁷ Because of these revelations the election had been declared invalid, although Sturge had declined to stand a second time.⁸⁸ More generally (and importantly) *The Times* was the political opposite of the *Star*: conservative where the *Star* was radical; elitist where the *Star* was egalitarian; and above all militaristic where the *Star* promoted a policy of negotiation, non-aggression and was openly critical of British imperial policy.

The two papers clashed on 26 March 1856 when *The Times* condemned the Crimean peace treaty then being negotiated in Paris.⁸⁹ The British, it insisted, were morally obliged to provide military protection to the Rayah, or Christian subjects, of the Ottoman Sultanate. That the Sultan rejected British

involvement, despite receiving military assistance during the Crimean conflict was held to be the grossest form of ingratitude. 'The old Tartar obstinacy yet lives,' *The Times* warned, 'and the West must prepare itself for resistance'.⁹⁰ Identical demands by Russia, the *Star* pointed out, had been the catalyst for war in the Crimea and had been condemned by *The Times* as Russian territorial aggrandisement'.⁹¹ The *Morning Star* went further than a simple refutation of *The Times*'s sabre-rattling—it attacked the very 'us and them' morality that *The Times* was utilising. 'Sebastopol,' it stated in April 1856, 'in the character of buildings, is not unlike some parts of Bath or Cheltenham'. A description of the aftermath of one Crimean battle went further, and, by portraying the Russian civilians as victims, underlined a shared humanity and suggested that even a British military victory was something to be deplored:

The gateway was half-open, but a rent in the woodwork showed where a cannon shot had probably passed through it before Sebastopol was taken. We were entering when a sickening pestilential vapour made us pause and look back. A man lay there whose breast appeared to have been blown away and his head, ghastly, swollen, hung back upon the stones. Three others were underneath him, and two feet protruded from the frightful mass, which from the whiteness and the size, we judged to be that of a woman . . . beyond, at the end of the courtyard, broken furniture was tossed from the windows by French soldiers, and others were examining it as it came out, piling up card tables, and chairs and couches, and everything that was good to use or burn. The courtyard was strewn with Russian books, thrown aside as useless. I picked one up; it had a name written within it and pen and ink sketches of birds and animals such as children draw upon their sketch-books.⁹²

Although the publication of such uncompromising imagery required considerable courage it was, for Langley, intrinsic to his ethical and political beliefs. He had lectured on his opposition to militarism in topics such as the 'French Invasion Panic' and 'The Cost and Dangers of a Large Military Establishment'.⁹³ Moreover, as a Unitarian he belonged to a faith that had been at the forefront of such anti-war activism.⁹⁴ For Langley, as for his compatriots at the *Morning Star*, the real challenge came when fresh conflicts erupted and they were forced to defend their political principles in the face of hostile public opinion.

This occurred on 1 January 1856 when *The Times* printed details of the *Arrow* affair from their correspondent in Hong Kong.⁹⁵ A Chinese official,

Commissioner Yeh, had ordered the arrest of several suspected pirates who were employed aboard the *lorcha*-class trading vessel of that name. The ship, although owned and crewed by Chinese nationals, had a British captain and was flying (at least according to British accounts) the British ensign.⁹⁶ Chinese police had taken the entire crew, excepting the captain, into custody. British outrage at both the flouting of maritime law and the desecration of the British flag was immediate and fierce. The Chief Superintendent of Trade in the Far East and H.M. Plenipotentiary, Sir John Bowring, demanded an official apology and the return of all the arrested men. After some diplomatic wrangling, Bowring commenced bombardment of the nearby Whampoa forts. Four days later, the attack moved to the city of Canton itself and a series of drawn-out skirmishes between British warships and Chinese junks and land-based forts followed.

Many British newspapers immediately justified the British action, portraying it not as aggression but as an act of self-defence. *The Times* in particular was virulent in its condemnation of the Chinese.⁹⁷ They were, it claimed, ‘tutored from their childhood, and from father to son for several generations, to hate and despise the foreigner’. It suggested that Yeh was both ‘a man so far committed in a dangerous course that he loses a faculty of exercising a sane judgement’ and that he had cynically arranged for the conflict ‘not as against that particular *lorcha*, but against all the *lorchas*, and the whole system of vessels so manned and so employed’.⁹⁸ Other newspapers, even those of a Liberal persuasion, made scurrilous accusations. *Punch*, for example, reported:

Mr Commissioner Yeh had tied up thousands of men and women at his place of execution, and had them flayed alive and cut into slices, and that only a little time back the amiable Cantonese tortured a French Missionary for three days and then burned him.⁹⁹

When a Chinese baker was accused of poisoning British merchants in retaliation for the naval bombardment, British national xenophobia was openly expressed. The *Morning Post* declared:

Talk of international law with sanguinary savages such as these! There is but one law for such demons in human shape, and that is a law of severe, summary and inexorable justice.¹⁰⁰

In truth there was more to the British actions than indignant reprisals for a supposed slight. Bowring had successfully used the threat of violence to open

trade in Siam and while describing the Chinese actions as a deliberate challenge to British sovereignty, he saw this as a means of imposing similar trade concessions upon the reluctant Chinese authorities.¹⁰¹ In a letter to the Foreign Secretary, Lord Clarendon, he admitted, 'I am not sorry this affair of the *Arrow* has occurred, the lesson will be a very useful one and may lead to many practical results'.¹⁰²

Through the *Morning Star* Langley was able to express a rival interpretation of events. First, it questioned the judgement of Bowring's 'hasty and violent conduct'.¹⁰³ The British, it claimed, resembled Cornish wreckers seeing a ship floundering and seeking personal gain, or of vultures as 'Where the carcass [*sic*] is there the eagles are gathered together'.¹⁰⁴ The *Morning Star* was in no doubt that the crisis had been exploited by the British authorities to annex China as they had India.¹⁰⁵ But, as with its coverage of Bousfield and Ann Burton, it simultaneously encouraged its readership to view the Chinese not as an enemy but as fellow human beings. Even as the conflict raged the *Star* published letters from a special correspondent, travelling through the environs of Shanghai and the mainland giving detailed descriptions of day-to-day life of the Chinese people.¹⁰⁶

One striking feature of the [Chinese] national character is politeness. This quality is not confined to the respectable citizens, but is possessed nearly generally by the poor country people.¹⁰⁷

When rumours of a second conflict erupted in British India, newspapers initially showed little concern.¹⁰⁸ *The Times* was typically sanguine and reassured its readers the continent was secure, for:

Whether it be among the Hindoos and Mussulmans of India, the Turks on the Danube or in Armenia, the Arabs of the Euphrates, or the Caffres of Southern Africa, the Englishman has always managed to establish an ascendancy which, though it may be struggled against, is not the less irresistible and permanent.¹⁰⁹

It was a view shared by most newspapers. The *Morning Post* saw 'no danger in the present movement, provided it be met promptly and without wavering'.¹¹⁰ The *Bradford Observer*, *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper* and *John Bull*, while recording the hanging of two Sepoys for the wounding of a British officer, simply stated that news from India was 'not of an exciting character'.¹¹¹ When the uprising was mentioned it was dismissed as the work of native superstition or attributed to the influence of sinister Russian agitators.¹¹²

This was not the case within the pages of *The Morning Star*. From its first week of publication it had highlighted, and deplored, the annexation of the formerly independent kingdom of Oude.¹¹³ It had also unsuccessfully campaigned against the granting of a £5,000 a year annuity to Lord Dalhousie, the former Governor General of India, and the man responsible.¹¹⁴ The *Star* attributed the uprising not to the backwardness of Indian society but to British greed, misadministration and incompetence:

We have chosen to make the Government of that country rest on the points of bayonets. We have made war our study and our boast. The enormous revenues, which we have wrung from the oppressed and impoverished natives, we have devoted almost exclusively to extending our conquests and perfecting our military organisation. Under cover of some stupid cant about our ‘destiny’, which has always been the ready apology for great crimes, we have pushed forward our encroachments on every hand, deposing kings, annexing territories, enlarging our frontier, at every step increasing our danger and rendering permanent peace less possible.¹¹⁵

On 14 July, it reprinted the 1856 Madras Royal Commissioner’s report. This had concluded:

The police establishment is the bane and pest of society, the terror of the community, and the origin of half the misery and discontent that exists among the subjects of the Government; corruption and bribery reign paramount throughout the whole establishment. Violence, torture and cruelty are the chief instruments for detecting crime, implication of innocence, or extorting money. Robberies are daily and nightly committed, and not unfrequently with their connivance. The so-called police is little better than a delusion; it is a terror to well disposed and peaceable people none whatever to thieves and rogues.¹¹⁶

In Bengal—the origin of the uprising—the *Morning Star* reported that ‘an amount of abasement and suffering existed which was probably not equalled, and certainly not exceeded, in the slave states of America.’¹¹⁷

Such candid reporting took great courage, especially as reports of atrocities against British civilians began to arrive. Like its contemporaries the *Morning*

Star gave detailed descriptions of these. The siege of Cawnpore, for instance, where a small British garrison was forced to surrender and then massacred alongside their families, was given detailed coverage:

The courtyard in front of the assembly rooms, in which Nana Sahib had had head quarters, and in which the women had been imprisoned, was swimming with blood. A large number of women and children, who have been 'cruelly spared after the capitulation for a worse fate than instant death,' had been barbarously slaughtered on the previous morning, the former having been stripped naked, beheaded and thrown into a well; the latter having been thrown down alive onto their butchered mothers, whose blood yet reeked on their mangled bodies.¹¹⁸

But unlike its contemporaries, the *Morning Star* deplored the calls for British vengeance. In August 1857, *Punch* published the John Tenniel (1820–1914) cartoon 'The British Lion's Vengeance on the Bengal Tiger', in which an Indian tiger, standing over a fallen (white) woman and child, recoils in terror as the British Lion leaps, fangs bared, to the exact a bloody retribution. Soon afterwards *Punch* published the cartoon 'Justice', also by Tenniel, which showed the goddess of judgement, sword drawn and surrounded by dead or dying Sepoys. Around her British soldiers similarly inflict their revenge upon the enemy, while Indian widows weep in the background.¹¹⁹ Perhaps even more bloodthirsty were the widely published poems of Martin F. Tupper (1810–1889):

But—Delhi?—Yes, terrific be its utter sack and rout,
 Our vengeance is indelible—when Delhi is wiped out,
 And only so; one stone upon another shall not stand,
 For England swears so to see her mark upon the traitor-land!

Her mark the hand of justice, the Cross—a cross of flame
 Where Englishwomen perished in unutterable shame;
 Her mark, the cross of mercy too above those martyred good,
 A marble cross on that burnt spot where once proud Delhi stood!¹²⁰

The Times was similarly bloodthirsty. Reporting on the approach of British forces to Delhi, it promised its readers that 'the hour can not be long retarded when in which deeds of unspeakable horror shall be matched by a retribution

as fearful and as stern'.¹²¹ Langley, or if not he someone with a very similar writing style, vehemently protested against *The Times*' article:

We do not believe that the writer in question wants, with his *own* ears to listen to the shrieks of the virgin daughters of Delhi, to hear the moaning outcries of pregnant women, or to have his heart appalled by the unutterable anguish of those mothers who give suck in that terrible day.¹²²

The feared British retribution was not long in coming and the *Morning Star* courageously defied public opinion by remaining sympathetic to the fate of the Indian rebels. In August it printed a letter from a British resident that declared 'Hanging is the order of the day here, I am happy to say'.¹²³ In September it reported the actions of General Neill (1810–1857), who forced rebels to clean blood—that of pigs for a Muslim, of a cow for a Hindu—and which according to their respective faith ensured eternal perdition—before hanging them.¹²⁴ Editorials within the *Morning Star* deplored such actions, but the paper saved its most vitriolic responses not for the troops in India, as

nobody could have expected anything else, fresh as the men were from witnessing the unutterable horrors that met their eyes as they entered Cawnpore.

But for the armchair warmongers at *The Times* and elsewhere,

it is no part of the duty of civilians or any men here in England to incite the soldiery in India to deeds of vengeance under the plea of retribution . . . our duty is rather to moderate their fierce passions and to impress upon the minds of our military chiefs that we mean to govern India, not to ravage it.¹²⁵

To many outraged readers the *Star*'s criticisms of military policy, which clashed so jarringly with the heroic descriptions of its contemporaries, were simply 'un-British'.¹²⁶ The *Illustrated London News* demanded to know:

What do those who cry out for mercy to such wretches say of the murders of helpless babes and unoffending women? and of the almost incredible indignities and cruelties committed upon English ladies—cruelties so horrible that their mere mention is almost an offence in itself?¹²⁷

By continuing to publish accurate but impolitic reports, Langley saw support for his paper plummet. In August, at the height of the rebellion, sales of the paper were only 15,300 daily, down from a peak during the Palmer affair of 50,000.¹²⁸

For Langley, this struggle for readership was matched by conflict within the newspaper itself. Cobden's choice for editor had been William Haly, a former political correspondent on both the *Daily News* and *The Times*.¹²⁹ The paper's other proprietor, John Bright, was opposed to this appointment, believing that Haly would be too focused upon making a profit, ignoring the reformers' desire to educate and inform the public.¹³⁰ The two proprietors compromised by appointing Haly news editor, with two other men, George Wilson and Henry Rawson, being 'of the soundest political principles' managing the papers business arrangements.¹³¹ To make matters worse, Cobden believed Rawson to be 'a selfish money loving chap' (although in the context of his managerial role, this was not necessarily a bad thing). It was a disastrous arrangement and the inaugural issue of the *Morning Star* was riddled with proofreading oversights. Under the heading 'Deaths', for example, the *Star* printed a list of weddings. Such mistakes caused the proprietors to complain of the 'Most wretched hap hazard management & most disgraceful errors of the press'.¹³² As a result of such mistakes, Haly received a 'butler like' dismissal.¹³³ He did not go gracefully, and Langley was forced to deal with prolonged wrangling over severance pay. This left a vacancy for the position of editor but, once again, there was disagreement amongst the paper's owners as to a suitable candidate. Abraham Walter Paulton, a former anti-corn law activist and co-proprietor of the *Manchester Times* was suggested as a replacement. But he had previously been in business with the Business Manager Henry Rawson and their partnership had not ended amicably. Paulton accused Rawson of 'looseness in business matters', Rawson in turn complained Paulton was 'so lazy that it was useless to depend on his doing anything'.¹³⁴ A third man, John Hamilton, was then appointed. Although a skilled journalist, 'almost a genius' according to Cobden, he was less suited to be chief editor of the paper. 'He falls into occasional grotesqueries,' a letter complained 'and blunders from a monk-like ignorance of the outside world'.¹³⁵ To make matters worse for Langley's management of the newspaper, the Manchester-based proprietors had also employed the Welsh activist (and later MP for Merthyr) the Reverend Henry Richard to attend the office as their representative. Hamilton saw this, quite accurately, as a threat to his authority, especially as Richard chose to make the editor's office his own.¹³⁶

For Langley managing the conflicting parties was a Sisyphean task. In addition to the constantly changing editorial staff, the office he was supposed to run was

disorganised, and there was unremitting friction between the London and Manchester offices. Richard Cobden, although officially stating of the *Morning Star* ‘I am not concerned in it in a pecuniary sense nor have I voice or control in its management’, had accepted the role of editorial adviser and inundated the paper with suggestions and demands.¹³⁷ Charles Cooper, who began working for the paper in 1861, noted that it had reporting staff ‘not more than half the size of that of *The Times* and . . . smaller than that of any other paper’.¹³⁸ Finances too were irregular and in July 1856 Langley wrote to his employers warning that contributors and suppliers were being left unpaid, or receiving remuneration from the pockets of the paper’s senior staff.¹³⁹ Despite this Rawson and Wilson were instructed to oversee a reduction in staffing and wages.¹⁴⁰ Langley was forced to take the role of not just manager but also editor of the paper.¹⁴¹ The continued pressure and unwanted responsibility was to have an adverse effect. ‘Mr Langley,’ so stated an 1866 election flyer of his time at the *Star*, ‘was selected as its General Manager, and laid the foundation of its foreign and home connections; but his labours in this capacity were too great for his physical capabilities, and beneath them his health nearly broke down’.¹⁴²

Although his physical wellbeing had suffered, Langley undoubtedly benefited in other areas. By the time he left, around June 1858, he was amongst the leading activists in many of the causes that the paper promoted. From the sarcastic polemicist of the *Stockport Mercury* he had evolved into an effective and ambitious political orator. But perhaps the most lasting of the paper’s influence upon Langley was his interaction with men who had been successfully elected to Parliament and yet had remained loyal to their radical ideals. Later in his political career Langley would endeavour to join them.

Notes

- 1 J. Baxter Langley, ‘Committee on Public Libraries’, *Daily News*, 25 October 1849.
- 2 ‘Reform Association’, *Manchester Times*, 15 October 1853.
- 3 *Ibid.*
- 4 J. Baxter Langley, ‘Committee on Public Libraries’, *Daily News*, 25 October 1849; James Ballantine, *Chronicle of the 100th Birthday of Robert Burns* (Edinburgh and London: A. Fullerton & Co., 1859) p. 473.
- 5 ‘Recollections of the Hospitals’, *Oddfellows Quarterly Magazine*, April 1848, pp. 65–68.
- 6 ‘Annual Meeting of the Independent Order of Oddfellows’, *Blackburn Standard*, 21 June 1848.

- 7 'Editorial', *Oddfellows Quarterly Magazine*, April 1848.
- 8 C. Mitchell, *The Newspaper Press Directory and Advertisers' Guide Containing Particulars of Every Newspaper, Magazine, Review and Periodical in the United Kingdom and the British Isles* (London: C. Mitchell & Co., 1849) p. 242. The first issue of the *Mercury* was published on 22 January 1847.
- 9 Mitchell, *Directory*, p. 241; 'To the Editor of the *Stockport Mercury*', *Stockport Mercury*, 13 October 1848.
- 10 Mitchell, *Directory*, p. 241.
- 11 'Barrett v. Marsland', *Stockport Mercury*, 8 September 1848.
- 12 'To the Editor of the *Stockport Mercury*', *Stockport Mercury*, 22 September 1848.
- 13 'The So-Called Rioters', *Stockport Mercury*, 8 September 1848; 'Stockport', *Stockport Mercury*, 9 November 1848; 'To the Editor of the *Stockport Mercury*', *Stockport Mercury*, 22 September 1848.
- 14 'Election Riot at Stockport', *Stockport Mercury*, 31 August 1848.
- 15 'An Extraordinary Case', *Stockport Mercury*, 25 August 1848; 'The Election 'Martyrs'', *Stockport Advertiser*, 17 November 1848. Further details were revealed in the *Stockport Advertiser*, 24 November 1848. Elkanah Cheetham had acted as election agent for the magistrate Major Thomas Marsland.
- 16 'An Extraordinary Case', *Stockport Mercury*, 25 August 1848; 'Stockport', *Stockport Advertiser*, 8 September 1848. Windows had been broken only after boiling water was thrown through them at the protestors outside.
- 17 'Stockport', *Stockport Mercury*, 8 September 1848. The actual words of the legislation were 'Act 5th and 6th William IV', c. 62 stated 'that it shall and may be lawful for any justice of the peace . . .' The Magistrate took 'may' as indicating discretionary powers.
- 18 'Tory Tyranny—Messrs Robinson and Woolley's Case', *Stockport Mercury*, 24 November 1848; 'Tea Party and Demonstration', *Stockport Mercury*, 1 December 1848; 'The Late Political Movements', *Stockport Advertiser*, 1 December 1848.
- 19 'Municipal Elections—Triumph of the Economists', *Stockport Advertiser*, 3 November 1848.
- 20 'Stockport', *Stockport Mercury*, 22 September 1848.
- 21 'The Revision of the Burgess Role', *Stockport Advertiser*, 13 October 1848.
- 22 'Stockport—Thursday Evening', *Stockport Mercury*, 22 September 1848.
- 23 'Working Man's Ratepayers Association' [Portwood Ward], *Stockport Mercury*, 22 September 1848.
- 24 'Working Man's Ratepayers Association', *Stockport Mercury*, 15 September 1848; 'Ratepayers Association Meeting in Edgely', *Ibid.*; 'Special Meeting of the Town Council', *Stockport Mercury*, 31 August 1848.
- 25 'Beta v. Boat', *Stockport Mercury*, 15 September 1848.
- 26 'Special Meeting of the Town Council', *Stockport Mercury*, 8 September 1848; 'Mr Marsland and Sabbath Breaking', *Stockport Advertiser*, 26 May 1848.

- 27 'The Working Men's Ratepayers Association', *Stockport Mercury*, 25 September 1848.
- 28 'Municipal Elections—Meeting of the Burgesses at the Dog and Duck', *Stockport Mercury*, 6 October 1848.
- 29 'The Self-styled Economists', *Stockport Mercury*, 17 November 1848; 'The Late Town Clerk and ourselves', *Stockport Advertiser*, 8 December 1849; 'The Corporation Debt', *Stockport Advertiser*, 8 December 1849.
- 30 'Public Meeting at the Lyceum', *Stockport Mercury*, 27 October 1848.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 'To the Editor of the *Stockport Mercury*', *Stockport Mercury*, 10 November 1848. The *Ocean Monarch* was an emigration barque that sank after catching fire off the coast of Llandudno on 24 August 1848.
- 33 'Public Meeting at the lyceum on Wednesday', *Stockport Mercury*, 27 October 1848.
- 34 'Working Men's Ratepayers Association – [St Mary's Ward]', *Stockport Mercury*, 22 September 1848.
- 35 Hannah Barker, *Newspapers, Politics and English Society, 1695–1855* (Harlow: Longman, 2000) p. 27.
- 36 'To the Editor of the *Stockport Mercury*', *Stockport Mercury*, 8 September 1848.
- 37 'To the Editor of the *Stockport Mercury*', *Stockport Mercury*, 22 September 1848.
- 38 'Stockport—Thursday Evening', *Stockport Mercury*, 27 October 1848. Although no examples of these placards survived, the accusations that they contained are clearly dealt with in Langley's rebuttal.
- 39 This was another term for the then popular blackface minstrels.
- 40 Rev. John Langley, 'Donations to the Industrial Schools', *Preston Guardian*, 27 December 1862.
- 41 'To the Editor of the *Stockport Mercury*', *Stockport Mercury*, 27 October 1848.
- 42 Ibid.
- 43 'The Man in the Streets', *Stockport Mercury*, 27 October 1848; 'A Greenacres Tragedy', *Morning Star*, 12 October 1857.
- 44 'To the Editor of the *Stockport Mercury*', *Stockport Mercury*, 3 November 1848.
- 45 'To the Editor of the *Stockport Mercury*', *Stockport Mercury*, 15 December 1848 was to report Elkanah Cheetham had been arrested for public drunkenness.
- 46 'To the Editor of the *Stockport Mercury*', *Stockport Mercury*, 3 November 1848.
- 47 'Triumph of the Economists', *Stockport Advertiser*, 3 November 1848.
- 48 'The First Meeting of the New Town Council', *Stockport Mercury*, 10 November 1848.
- 49 'Office of Town Clerk and Magistrates' Clerk', *Stockport Advertiser*, 23 November 1848.
- 50 'S.H. Cheetham—Special Meeting of the Town Council', *Stockport Mercury*, 31 August 1848.
- 51 'Letter from J. Baxter Langley', *Stockport Mercury*, 13 April 1849.

- 52 'Stockport, Thursday Evening, April 5', *Stockport Mercury*, 6 April 1849.
- 53 Ibid.
- 54 'Mr. Langley and the Mercury', *Stockport Mercury*, 13 April 1849.
- 55 'Editorial', *Stockport Mercury*, 17 September 1847.
- 56 'Stockport', *Stockport Mercury*, 1 December 1848.
- 57 'The Battle for Goojerat', *Stockport Mercury*, 20 April 1849.
- 58 *Manchester Times*, 23 April 1853; *Preston Guardian*, 16 April 1863.
- 59 *North Wales Chronicle*, 21 September 1850.
- 60 *Leeds Mercury*, 27 April 1850.
- 61 The two papers were identical except that the *Evening Star* contained slightly less advertising and occasionally updated articles.
- 62 Miles Taylor, 'Bright, John' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) (September 2013) <www.oxforddnb.com.library.sl.nsw.gov.au/view/article/3421> [accessed 3 April 2014]; Miles Taylor, 'Cobden, Richard (1804–1865)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (May 2009) <www.oxforddnb.com.library.sl.nsw.gov.au/view/article/5741> [accessed 3 April 2014].
- 63 Alex Tyrrell, 'Sturge, Joseph (1793–1859)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (May 2009) <www.oxforddnb.com.library.sl.nsw.gov.au/view/article/26746> [accessed 3 April 2014]
- 64 'National Reform Conference', *Leeds Mercury*, 27 April 1850.
- 65 'History of the Anti-Corn-Law League', *Manchester Times*, 23 April 1853.
- 66 Taylor, 'Cobden', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [accessed 3 April 2014].
- 67 'Peace and Financial Reform Meeting', *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, 24 April 1853.
- 68 'Editorial', *Morning Star*, 17 March 1856.
- 69 'Cobden to Bright, Midhurst, September 30, 1855,' in John Morley, *The Life of Richard Cobden* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1903) p. 172.
- 70 [J. Baxter Langley] 'A Man in the Streets', *Morning Star*, 18 March 1856.
- 71 'London, Tuesday May 19, 1857', *Morning Star*, 19 May 1857.
- 72 'Reform of Young Criminals in Somersetshire', *Morning Star*, 22 March 1856. The school had been rejected as it used a dissenting chapel, rather than a far more distant Church of England place of worship.
- 73 'Police Intelligence', *Morning Star*, 10 April 1856.
- 74 'The Rugeley Poisonings', *Morning Star*, 22 March 1856.
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Supporting the Miners, 1859–1860

In 1859 Baxter Langley accepted the position of editor of the *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*. He was by then well known; an established political spokesman, organiser and debater, as well as the former proprietor of the Chartist newspapers the *People's Paper* and the *London News*. But the financial losses incurred on those papers and the animosity that he had encountered from their former owner Ernest Jones, combined with his gruelling work schedule for the National Sunday League had again led to concerns about Langley's health—which the *National Sunday League Record* reported was in 'a precarious position'.¹ Moving to the *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, in addition to being steady, regular employment, meant working for (and alongside) his friend and political confederate Joseph Cowen (1829–1900). It seemed to presage an easier time for the exhausted Langley.

Langley and Cowen had collaborated previously in the Political Reform League but also, and more importantly, in the wake of the 'Orsini affair'. This was a major event in mid-nineteenth-century radical history. In January 1858 the Emperor of the French, Napoleon III (formerly President of the French Republic as Louis Napoleon Bonaparte), had been ambushed whilst en route to the Paris opera. Three bombs had been thrown at the imperial carriage and although the Emperor and his consort Eugenie had escaped virtually unscathed, six people had been killed and more than 100 injured.² An Italian nationalist named Felicé Orsini (1819–1858) had implemented the plan but many of Langley's own associates had been incriminated.

The bombs, which used a unique fulminate of mercury explosive, were traced back to English reformer Thomas Allsop (1795–1880).³ Further investigation revealed a British-based French émigré, Simon François Bernard (1817–1862), had transported the devices across the Channel.⁴ Kept secret at the time, but revealed many years later, was the fact that a third English radical, and a friend of Langley, George Jacob Holyoake, had tested the weapons.⁵

Joseph Cowen, the proprietor of the *Chronicle* had also been also implicated. An outspoken supporter of Italian nationalism, Cowen had allowed Orsini to stay at his home shortly before the attempt, provided him with financial assistance and the two had held 'repeated conversations . . . about tyrannicide—a matter in which he [Orsini] seemed interested'.⁶ The attack led to a furious diplomatic response from the French authorities. Britain was, they claimed, '*ce repaire d'assassins*' ['the lair of assassins'], and war-clouds seemed to gather in the aftermath.⁷ In an effort to placate Gallic sensibilities, Lord Palmerston's administration introduced a Conspiracy to Murder Bill. This would have transformed the planning of an overseas assassination from a misdemeanour into a criminal offence. Arrest warrants were also issued for both Bernard and Allsop. Although there is no evidence that Langley played a direct role in the assassination plot, it is certainly not beyond the realms of possibility. When Allsop avoided arrest by fleeing to the United States, Langley remained in constant communication with the fugitive and updated him on political events. Working with Cowen, Anna Allsop and George Holyoake, Langley also developed a plan to prevent Allsop having to stand trial. It was clear that government attempts to placate the French were seen by the British public as weakness and Langley and Holyoake exploited this feeling. They attempted to claim the £200 reward that had been offered for Allsop's capture, while making it clear that the money would be immediately donated to his legal defence. Such an action would have placed the Home Secretary, Spencer Walpole, in the absurd position of making an unpopular arrest of an Englishman for events that occurred in France, whilst simultaneously paying for him to fight the charges. Radical MPs also helped by promising that the Home Secretary would be inundated with questions on the matter should it proceed.⁸ Walpole blinked, the charges were forgotten and on 28 June 1858 Holyoake wrote to inform Allsop that the case had been dropped. 'Mr Langley,' he informed the fugitive, 'brings me word from Mr Walpole that *you are free to return to England as soon as you please*'.⁹

For Cowen, the Orsini Affair showed that Langley was not only a man of political conviction but also someone who could be trusted in an emergency. In addition to employing him as editor of his newspaper, it was evident the two men were friends and socialised outside business hours. Cowen, for example, was a strong supporter of the Blaydon and Stella Mechanics' Institute. Langley not only attended the Institute, but his daughters Maria and Mary provided musical entertainment, and he was a speaker at the opening of its new building on 27 September 1859.¹⁰ For Langley the editorship of an established and successful newspaper such as the *Chronicle*—which had been published weekly for nearly 100 years and boasted of having been 'liberal

when liberals were few’—provided both a steady income and a sympathetic working environment.¹¹

Immediately after Langley’s arrival there was a marked change in the *Chronicle*’s tone. Under its former proprietor, Mark William Lambert, the paper had been liberal but moderate and often simplistic in outlook. The article ‘Destructiveness a Friend of Peace’, for instance, applauded the invention of a long-range cannon by suggesting that its efficiency could end war altogether.¹² The trite romanticism of ‘A PRETTY GIRL’ published in January 1859 might also explain why the paper was in financial difficulties at the time of Langley’s arrival:¹³

I want to know if there exists any invention, any delicate and elaborate device, any cunning tapestried warp or woof, any marvel of patent human handiwork, from the Peacock throne at Delhi, to St. Cuthbert’s Missal in the British Museum, that can equal in beauty and delight, and in a thousand joys, that wondrous amalgam, a Pretty Girl! What a glorious mystery she is—what a concentric puzzle—what a competition defying, rival maddening, first-rate article!¹⁴

By late 1859 the *Newcastle Daily Chronicle* had become far more radical in tone and uncompromising in rhetoric. As Cowen was said to have ‘left everything to his editor and staff. There was never any direct interference’, this radicalism probably reflected Langley’s influence.¹⁵ It is telling, also, that alone of the papers on which Langley was employed—the *Chronicle*—contained pieces signed ‘JBL’ rather than ‘Editor’ or his *nom de plume* ‘A Man in the Streets’.¹⁶ The ‘Sepoy Mutiny,’ the *Chronicle* declared, was ‘a bloody reaction against long years of cruelty, torture and political dishonesty’ which ‘rendered it no longer possible that the East India Company should retain its much abused powers’.¹⁷ Similarly, the ‘Second Opium War’ was headlined ‘The British Crown disgraced in China’ and the government-appointed ‘Registrar General and Protector of Chinese Inhabitants’, Daniel Richard Caldwell, described as ‘The Hong Kong Terrorist’.¹⁸ Capital punishment was condemned as the ‘public throttling of a human being’ and corruption within the Tory party exposed in the ‘rotten borough of Berwick’.¹⁹ Much of this is worthy of closer examination in its own right but restrictions of space (and a pre-occupation with campaigns rather than commentary) dictate that this chapter concentrate upon Langley’s connection with the mining industry, his involvement with the Miners’ Provident Society and his response to the Burradon Colliery disaster.

Unlike Cowen, who was born in the Tyneside area, Langley had no long-standing links to the district. Shortly after his arrival, therefore, he made a notable attempt to forge links with the local people and understand their working environment. As part of this he visited the mining community of Burradon, situated six miles northeast of Newcastle, and even descended to the coalface itself. Originally owned by Lord Ravensworth, Burradon had been extended to meet the increased demand for coal and then sold, first to local pit magnates the Carr family, and in the 1850s to Joshua Bower and Co.—the Carr family company, however, maintained a financial interest in the colliery.²⁰ This increase in production resulted in the doubling of Burradon's population between 1830 and 1860.²¹ Housing built to facilitate such growth was largely of a very basic standard. Burradon Pit Row, for example—built around the 1820s but still in use at the time of Langley's visit in 1859—contained houses of one room and an attic. Water was collected from one of four local wells and, lacking sanitation, effluent was thrown against a nearby wall for collection by local farmers.²²

The that mine Langley descended had two shafts, each of a depth of 870 feet.²³ A furnace situated halfway down the 'updraft' forced hot air upwards and thereby encouraged ventilation through the opposing 'downdraft'.²⁴ This clean air was directed through the pit via a system of permanent stoppings and through the opening and shutting of trapdoors. Boys—usually aged 10 or 11 and known as 'trappers'—were employed to operate these as required. This fulfilled the dual function of providing a breathable atmosphere and dispersing the 'firedamp', a combustible mix of hydrocarbons, primarily methane, which formed naturally in the decomposition of coal. A 'donkey engine' situated above the updraft was used to remove water, while the miners themselves entered via a winding engine and cages. Each miner—or as they were known in Newcastle 'hewer'—had his own 'board' four or five yards wide square. Once an area had been cleared of coal the miner would turn 90 degrees and continue until he broke into the shaft of his neighbour, thus leaving a section to support the roof of the pit.²⁵ Between 80 per cent and 90 per cent of the coal was then extracted from these pillars, after which the area was considered 'broken'. The Burradon mine was known to be prone to 'firedamp' and candles were therefore forbidden, with safety lamps used exclusively in the area.

Langley described his arrival at the pit village and of being greeted warmly by the locals:

Into one of these 'cages' at Burradon amidst some smiles to see the editor in his 'pit claes ganging doon the pit,' I stepped, and before

I had time to look at my companions on either side, or opposite me, or to bid farewell to the bright sky, summer air or singing birds which a moment before had occupied my attention, the earth beneath seemed suddenly to give way, and I experienced a sensation like that which is produced in a ship at sea when she sinks in the trough between two heavy waves at sea.²⁶

Once he was underground Langley was given a tour of the colliery. Receiving introductions to the workers as he went:

I was highly satisfied with the fireman, a fine genial hearted fellow, who described his hermitage with a kind of pride, as he was generally quite alone for the whole of his 'shift'.

Although members of a working-class community, it soon became clear to Langley that the Burradon miners were amongst the best-educated men in the area:

We talked of politics and social economics in a manner which would have amazed Lord Shaftsbury and the Conservative members of the Committee of the Coal Trade. They might have learned something—as I did.²⁷

It was perhaps this social awareness that encouraged Langley to support—or to look to Burradon for support with—the fledgling Miners' Provident Society.²⁸ The organisation was designed to provide financial support for the families of miners killed or injured in accidents and was holding its first meetings around the time that Langley arrived in Newcastle. In the previous year there had been ninety-one deaths in the southern part of Durham alone, including the suffocation of nine men at the Page Bank Colliery.²⁹ Indeed, shortly after Langley had descended the Burradon Pit an explosion was reported at the nearby Washington Pit, in which eight people were killed. Langley and a Burradon miner and supporter of the society, William Urwin, travelled there to raise funds for the widows and press the need for a more permanent solution.³⁰

This was not the first time Langley had been an advocate of life assurance. Beginning in 1848 with a brief, single-issue editorship of the Manchester Unity of the Independent Order of Oddfellows magazine, Langley was also connected to the Professional Life Assurance Company, the General Provident Assurance Company Ltd and the Friend in Hand Benefit Society.³¹ In 1853, responding to

criticism of the movement in the *Manchester Courier*, Langley wrote two letters to the paper, later publishing these in pamphlet form.³² Most notably, however, one of his great successes was *The Life-Agent's Vade-Mecum and Practical Guide to Success in Life Assurance Business*. Skilfully written, this manual consisted of a series of short, numbered paragraphs explaining both the basics of the business alongside a series of stories, anecdotes and even poems, cross-referenced for ease of use and designed to convince prospective customers of the benefits of subscription.³³ 'Hopeless Lovers', for example (which Langley assured the reader was a true story), was the tale of Alfred, a medical student wooing the daughter of a wealthy alderman. Unimpressed by the suitor's financial prospects the father forbade the match. Rather than admit defeat 'Alfred' produced a life assurance policy, explaining that even were he to die prematurely his wife and family would be well cared for. Realising the judicious character of his prospective son-in-law the alderman relented, declaring 'I see it's no use objecting, so I am walking you up to the house to dinner'.³⁴ Hugely successful, the manual was first printed in 1854, reissued in 1856, 1862, 1869, 1870 and 1874 and remains available today. Although a financially efficacious move, there is little reason to doubt Langley's conviction that the business of life assurance should be conducted not just as a business but also as a great public duty. As he stated in *The Life-Agent's Vade-Mecum*, Life Assurance

is a *political duty*, since its general adoption in practice would be good for the common weal by the destruction of that great political evil—Pauperism . . . it is a *moral duty*, because it is an obligation on every person to expose to as few risks as possible the future interests of those with whom he has linked himself . . . It is a *religious duty*, because we are taught that 'He that provideth not for his own, and especially for those of his own household, hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel'.³⁵

Langley's involvement in the Miners' Provident Society, which was essentially an employment-based life assurance association, was therefore entirely in keeping with his previous political concerns. Reportedly present 'by invitation' at the inaugural meeting on 2 May 1859, it is clear that Langley was the driving force behind the association's inception.³⁶ He was responsible for formulating the proposed constitution, for appointing an actuary to oversee financial matters (initially this was to be Langley himself), and for explaining the workings of the organisation to prospective members. Typically, at no point did he accept payment for his services. He was joined by several of the

more politically aware men that he had met through his visit to Burradon Colliery. George Maddox, a 46-year-old hewer, was an active member and was to chair most of the organisation's subsequent meetings. A father of six he had also been employed at the Burradon Wesleyan chapel as a Sunday school teacher. William Urwin, aged 48, was likewise employed at Burradon and took the role of Secretary. Langley reported that Urwin possessed 'a comprehension of actuarial data and arithmetical calculation which was astonishing' and that 'as the Editor of this journal [he] feels it no condescension to speak of William Urwin as his friend'.³⁷ William Alderson, a deputy overman was also an active member. It is clear that beyond his professional roles as editor and proponent of the Provident Society, Langley felt an abiding sympathy for the area and genuine affection for its people. 'Such an excellent set of men,' he said of the Burradon miners, 'could rarely be found together'.³⁸

While organising and attending meetings Langley was concurrently employing his editorship of the *Newcastle Daily Chronicle* to promote the movement. A series of articles, editorials and letters—one signed 'A Man in the Pit' and almost certainly a new pseudonym for Langley's 'A Man in the Street'—called upon local miners to subscribe. The organisation's constitution was printed in full and the benefits of membership frequently expounded upon. Equally, editorials explained the differences between well run societies such as the Oddfellows—which relied upon the law of averages and rolled over any excess funds—and the poorly structured 'life boxes', which gave out profits at the end of each financial year and were prone to bankruptcy.³⁹ Despite this advocacy many potential subscribers were wary of committing their money and on 20 August 1859, the paper complained of the 'many difficulties arising from the apathy of the men, whose confidence in such institutions has been sorely shaken by the failures which have befallen the sick clubs and benefit societies'.⁴⁰ Organisational difficulties also beset the early society: there was confusion over the dates of meetings; expected delegates were 'absent for reasons best known to themselves'; and lectures, intended to explain the society's goals to other areas, failed to eventuate.⁴¹ On 2 August the paper reported that a recent meeting had been interrupted by a group of miners who had raised the motion 'that the co-operative stores were more likely to be beneficial than the Provident Society'.⁴²

More concerning still was the reaction of the Miners' Union. Langley spoke of having met union men who 'thought the political objects the Union had in view were more important than those which were proposed by the Miners' Provident Association' and as many working men could ill afford to pay subscriptions to both, they were opposed to the latter.⁴³ Union officials were equally suspicious. James Scott of the Bishopwearmouth branch of the Miners'

Union reputedly warned members that the Provident Society 'is a masters' trick to divert the minds of the men from the Union'.⁴⁴ In fact, the Miners' Union was simultaneously campaigning for a governmental surcharge of one farthing on every ton of coal sold, for the support of miners' widows and orphans; or 'to bring about, but by other means, the very benefits and advantages that are contemplated by the Miners' Provident Society'.⁴⁵

Such conflict was perhaps to be expected between Langley the middle-class liberal and the early unionists. Through the *Chronicle* Langley expressed views of unionisation that were, at best, ambivalent.⁴⁶ In its coverage of the 1859–60 London builders' strike the *Chronicle* argued that workers' demands for increased wages were unscientific; the worth of labour being determined by the 'inexorable law of supply and demand'. If workers demanded a wage above the value of their labour their employer would become uncompetitive and risk bankruptcy. If the employer offered wages at too low a rate, he would acquire only substandard workers, his product would become inferior to that of his rivals and he would have trouble selling it. A natural balance was therefore both predetermined and inevitable. If Langley was critical of union demands, however, his view of the employers was even more unfavourable. When the Central Association of Master Builders responded to wage-demands by announcing that they would no longer employ any man with links to the union, the paper decried it as dictatorship. The right of men to combine was, for 'Advanced Liberals' such as Langley, part of a larger platform of political freedoms. To forbid the right of men to combine, while protecting the identical right of employers to organise, was typical of an unrepresentative governing elite legislating for their own narrow, self-serving interests.⁴⁷

The rejection of the middle-class principles of Langley and his colleagues ensured that the Miners' Provident Society remained entirely separate from the union. Conciliatory rather than combative in nature it was able to focus exclusively on assuaging financial suffering within the mining industry. Four solutions were proposed to achieve this:

1. The payment of a certain amount at the death of a member from accident.
2. The provision of an annuity to persons permanently disabled by accident.
3. The provision of an annuity to members who live beyond their seventieth year.
4. Annuities to the widows of pitmen, etc., killed by accident, and an educational provision for the children.⁴⁸

In fact, rather than challenge the coal owners, the Provident Society was so vulnerable financially that it requested voluntary contributions from employers to meet preliminary legal expenses and to act as a guarantee ‘against temporary deviations from average’.⁴⁹ On 10 May 1859 a delegation of miners, mostly from Burradon and the nearby Seghill pits, and with Langley acting as spokesperson, attended a Newcastle meeting of the Coal Trade Committee ‘submitting the proposed constitution to the masters for approval’.⁵⁰ Langley had carefully collated statistics on life expectancy, and average length of employment to calculate necessary costs. An average payment of 3½d. per mineworker was required. Of this sum Langley proposed the pitman provide 2½d. and the owners the remaining penny.⁵¹ The Coal Committee was said to look favourably upon the scheme and promised to give it their consideration.

If an answer had been quickly forthcoming the Provident Society could have been operational within months. Langley, however, was still awaiting an answer—‘anticipated some months ago’—the following November.⁵² As a result, there was to be no support when the miners needed it most.

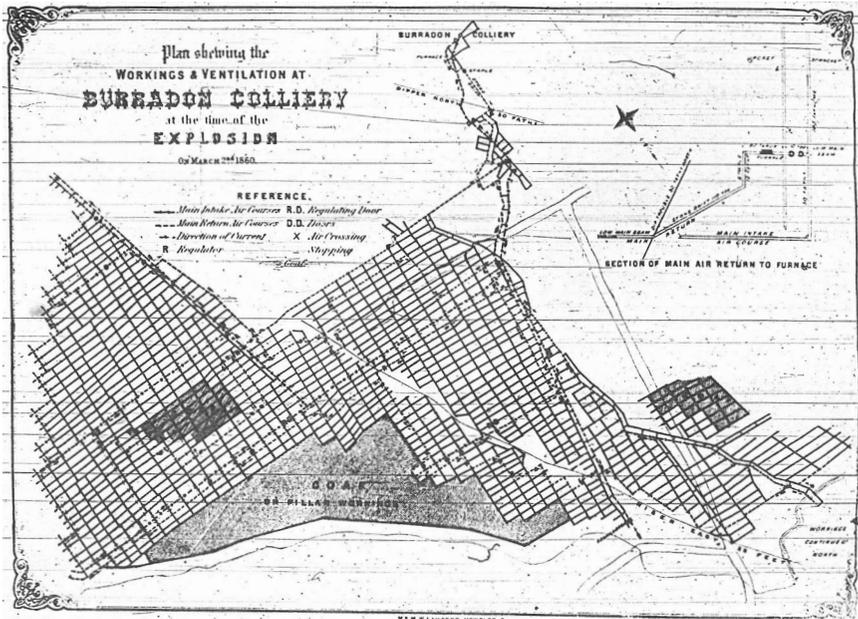


Figure 2: The Burradon Colliery at the time of the explosion
(*Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 16 March 1860).

At 6.30pm on 2 March 1860 a letter was delivered to the offices of the *Newcastle Daily Chronicle* addressed to J. Baxter Langley:⁵³

Dear Friend,—We wish you to come and see this terrible affair. Camperdown pit (Burradon) has exploded, and it is such an occurrence as has not taken place for many years in our district. No less than 50 men (some say 80 or more) are lost. It is only right that some one belonging to the press should be here. In fact, no one can describe it without seeing it. Our worthy friends, Maddox, Urwin &c., are no more.

While writing 10 or 11 only are found (all dead, of course). Oh, Mr. Langley, to see the heart-rending sight would un-nerve the strongest. Surely something ought to be done.⁵⁴

At around 2.30pm that same afternoon an underground explosion had occurred in one of the 'broken' areas at the Burradon pit. Although causing no casualties it was believed to have led to a rock-fall, which interrupted the flow of air to the main works. This had caused a build-up of the inflammable gas known as 'firedamp'. Witnesses spoke of a sudden change of pressure, and of seeing small pieces of coal flying through the air. One witness later reported seeing a small plume of flame running along the ceiling from the 'broken' towards the main works. Once there it ignited the accumulated pocket of 'firedamp' causing a second, and much larger, explosion. Those in the immediate vicinity were literally blown to pieces. When discovered their bodies were

so dreadfully burned and bruised as to be recognised with difficulty; few had any remnants of clothing remaining. Each of the corpses presented a dreadful spectacle but were sent up the pit shaft covered in blankets.⁵⁵

With lights extinguished by the explosion the hewers not killed outright were left in 'total and indescribable blackness of darkness'.⁵⁶ Even while struggling towards the safety of the airshaft the men fell victim to the 'afterdamp', an asphyxiating mixture of nitrogen and carbon dioxide that had formed as a result of the blast. Again, Langley reported:

About 300 yards past the top of the incline were twenty-five bodies all together. They had all been running after the first explosion, and

the fresh air had been cut off by the blowing away of the crossing. Thirteen of those were clasped hand-in-hand. Among these was the son of the deputy-overman Weatherley, he was ten years and four months old.⁵⁷

When casualties were determined it was found that seventy-six men and boys had lost their lives. Most of these had been on duty at the time but two men, Thomas Friar and Robert Jefferson, both of whom had children working in the mine, had descended in an attempted to provide assistance to their stricken colleagues and themselves fallen victim to the ‘afterdamp’. Their bodies were not recovered until two days later.⁵⁸ A ‘little lad of twelve or fourteen’ similarly perished having re-entered the pit in an effort to rescue his pony.⁵⁹

Langley returned to Burradon two days later. He was

welcomed in a manner which would have moved a heart of stone, with that kind of solemn affection which suppresses its ordinary forms of demonstration in the presence of the dead.⁶⁰

For Langley the explosion was more than a newspaper story. He had not only been down the pit in which the catastrophe had occurred, but he also knew many of the victims personally (publicly referring to them as friends). The epicentre of the explosion had occurred close to the workings of Langley’s friend George Maddox. Both the newspaper and official channels soon described this area as ‘Maddox’s Board’. Langley’s descriptions of the bodies being recovered were honest and at times painfully graphic. The body of Benjamin Nicholson, one of the last of the miners to be recovered, he reported had been so severely damaged that it was gathered by use of a shovel, the head, legs and one arm being completely removed by the force of the blast.⁶¹ It was the severity of such injuries that allowed the centre of the blast to be ascertained. The others killed in the explosion, he reported, were:

Black, mangled and distorted, the faces of the sufferers destroyed by the fire-damp have often totally lost all signs by which they can be recognised, and the remains are assigned to the friends by a kind of negative evidence, or by the discovery of some peculiarity in the remains of dress, or of some box or knife or trinket which bore the name.⁶²

There was undoubtedly genuine grief and anger in Langley’s reports of the disaster. But it is likely that the explicit nature of his descriptions served an

additional purpose. An undoubted humanist, Langley was also an activist and a realist. The changing nature of reporting, the repeal of the stamp duty, the advent of railways and of the electric telegraph had meant that Burradon, through the reports of the *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, could become a national rather than a local disaster.⁶³ Langley's dispatches were reprinted in other newspapers, most notably in the London-based broadsheet *The Times*.⁶⁴ With such a wide audience Langley went further than simply and dispassionately describing events; he used the *Chronicle* to inspire widespread sympathy and organise the relief of survivors.

In any working-class community the death of a family member, especially of the primary breadwinner, often left remaining family members facing destitution. But in a close-knit community such as Burradon this was exacerbated. Many of the local families had not simply lost one family member, but several. The Provident Society advocate George Maddox was an example; Langley described his friend as 'dreadfully burned, the body was charred, and the neck and thigh were broken'. But alongside him was his nephew, the 31-year-old John Maddox. Also killed were John's brothers, 19-year-old Thomas and 17-year-old James. A second John Maddox, aged 14, was also killed.⁶⁵ Nearby was found the body of John Thrift, 'a very excellent young man who was about to marry Maddox's eldest daughter'.⁶⁶ It was little wonder that Langley reported on his return to Burradon:

Everywhere, and in everybody's face, there is gloom, intensely deepened as the carts convey the dead bodies, one by one, to the homes of their friends, just as they are recognised.⁶⁷

Through the *Chronicle*, Langley proposed the collection of funds for the immediate relief of the widows and children of the stricken miners:

We want no long letters expressing deep condolence with the sufferers, but we implore that we may have immediate pecuniary means placed at our disposal to alleviate distress in the families of at least fifty of the most deserving workmen we ever knew.⁶⁸

By 5 March 1860 a flood of donations was arriving at the offices of the *Chronicle*; the largest single donation was £1,000 from T.J. Taylor, T.E. Foster and Edward Potter, 'Trustees of the Coal Trade'; the smallest being that of John F. Crowther who donated sixpence. Similar small donations were to come from the Killingworth Mechanics' Institute; the miners at West Moor; a Unitarian chapel;

and ‘a wedding party’ that donated £10.⁶⁹ The band of the Third West York Militia Regiment offered their services free of charge and the room at the New Town Hall was offered gratis for the performance.⁷⁰ One local baker, Mr Green, even donated loaves of bread, these being ‘gratefully received by the poor creatures’ and soon afterwards there was a performance by the United French and American Circus in North Shields.⁷¹ Langley himself gave 10s 6d.⁷² Additionally, a penny subscription was commenced at many local factories where smaller amounts could be contributed by working men and women.⁷³ By Friday 9 March, barely a week after the explosion, the *Chronicle* had raised over £200 and had sent out between sixty and seventy lists for others to do likewise.⁷⁴

Local miners were similarly active. Three days after the accident delegations from the nearby pits met at the Halfway House Inn at Burradon.⁷⁵ There they passed the following resolution:

That this meeting respectfully suggests with a view of securing the help and sympathy of the public, and the confidence and satisfaction of the pitmen and their relatives, that Mr. Langley be requested to take steps to form a committee for preliminary arrangements for the collection of the funds; that the Committee consist of the Mayors of Newcastle and Gateshead, the Chairman of the Coal Trade, and some of the delegates to be chosen from those attending the meeting above to be convened for Saturday the 10th March; and that Mr. Joseph Cowen jun., and Mr. J. Baxter Langley be requested to act as trustees of the fund, in co-operation with the committee.⁷⁶

A public meeting was held immediately afterwards at which Langley, ‘in obedience to a pressing request’, addressed the crowd and £4 was raised in donations towards the relief fund.⁷⁷

The *Chronicle* made a second passionate appeal for funds on 5 March 1860:

Following the blackened and distorted remains to the miner’s home reveals another scene less painful perhaps at the moment but fraught with distressing fears for the future of old men and women and little helpless children. Empty regrets without Christian sympathising action is mere hypocrisy. The payments ought to be made as public compensations than as charity involving a deep sense of obligation on the part of the recipients.⁷⁸

This was to become the focus of Langley's campaign. It was not enough for the funds he had collected, and which primarily had been donated not by the large industrial magnates but by ordinary working people across the country, to be

meted out as an unwilling and suspicious donation to beggars, who are expected to bow their head in deep humiliation to the distributors of the funds they only administer.⁷⁹

Langley proposed that the collected funds be invested in a friendly society and that payments be considered and administered as the rightful recompense to bereaved families rather than as an act of self-aggrandising largesse by mine owners.⁸⁰ Having collected extensive statistics of the local community through the Provident Society, Langley was also able to show that this could be achieved. The Burradon explosion had left thirty-one widows.⁸¹ Of these, seventeen were under 30 years old and sixteen had young families. There were a further seven widows between the ages of 30 and 40, and all of these had children; four widows were aged over 40; and three were aged over 50. Of the children made fatherless, there were thirty-four boys under the age of 12; and thirty-one girls under 12; and a further eleven between 12 and 16 years of age. If Bowers & Co., the owners of Burradon pit, would follow local custom and allow the widows to remain in their homes rent-free then an annuity could be established, providing to each home that had suffered loss, an income equal to that enjoyed before the accident.⁸² Langley suggested that the stipend be administered by a 'well known and accepted Life Assurance Company'. (Although this could be perceived as promoting the Miners' Provident Society, the use of 'well known' would hardly support this and there was no mention of specifics here or later in the paper's coverage.)⁸³ It was not to be viewed as charity but as a right; widows would continue to receive payment if they remarried and children receive theirs irrespective of the condition of their mothers.⁸⁴

This was not a scheme that enjoyed universal approval. Nor was the involvement of radical activists such as Langley and Cowen deemed appropriate by local mine-owning interests. On 6 March, there was a special gathering of the Committee of the Coal Trade. Resolution II of this meeting was that £1,000 should be donated to the relief fund; Resolution III was that the owners and managers of Burradon Pit should distribute it. The *Newcastle Journal*—a Tory-leaning rival to the *Chronicle*—thoroughly recommended this scheme.⁸⁵ For Langley, this was the antithesis of what the Burradon inhabitants deserved:

if we are to judge by the spirit of some of those who have arrogated to themselves the monopoly of the administration of charity which they took no pains to evoke—the comfort to the survivors will be of the coldest and haughtiest kind.⁸⁶

On 10 March, the meeting previously proposed by local miners ‘with a view of securing the help and sympathy of the public, and the confidence and satisfaction of the pitmen and their relatives’, was held in the Old Council Chamber in Newcastle.⁸⁷ Many of Newcastle’s wealthiest and most influential residents attended: the High Sheriff of Northumberland; the Lord Bishop of Newcastle; the Bishop of Durham (who took time away from ‘offering up prayers to the throne of grace for the orphans and widows’); and many other clergymen and wealthy members of the coal industry. The assembly had a twofold aim: first, to pass the motion that

We, the undersigned, respectfully request you will convene a public meeting of the inhabitants of the town to take into consideration the best mode of testifying our sympathy with the unfortunate sufferers by the recent explosion at Burradon.⁸⁸

A second motion was proposed by Lord Ravensworth, the former owner of Burradon and the Conservative MP for Northumberland South:

That in order to alleviate, as much as possible, the misery inseparable from such a disaster, and to relieve the destitution thereby occasioned, a public subscription be at once commenced, which this meeting pledges itself to use every effort to promote.

Both of these were in accordance with the wishes of the local pit workers who had initially called the meeting. They had also requested that Langley and Cowen be appointed as trustees of the relief fund. But the leaders of the meeting had other ideas. A number of men, all with considerable experience of the coal industry, were then proposed to oversee the fund’s distribution. Although all were connected to the mining trade, none was a resident of Burradon and none was a miner. Edward Potter, for example, was a vice president of the North of England Institute of Mining Engineers. Thomas John Taylor, also proposed, was colliery agent to the Duke of Northumberland, a former viewer and a founder member of the North of England Institute of Mining Engineers.⁸⁹ His brother John, with a similar background, was also proposed. Neither Langley nor Cowen was mentioned.

This can only be seen as a deliberate attempt to appropriate the role formerly, and popularly, assumed by Langley and the *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*. Had Langley not been present it would undoubtedly have succeeded. But, experienced in such political manoeuvrings, both Langley and Cowen were not only in the hall but were accompanied by a phalanx of political supporters and a group of sympathetic Burradon pitmen. As soon as the coal owners' proposals were announced, a Mr Gilmour, stood and proposed that Langley's name be added to the list. Langley similarly rose to propose Mr Mather, a wealthy local freethinker, and Cowen proposed Thomas Messer, Robert Green and Thomas Weatherley—all Burradon pitmen. The argument was then taken to the coal owners. Mather proposed that following an initial payment to those in need, the funds be placed in terminable annuities. Langley, 'with very great pleasure', seconded the motion adding:

I trust that on an occasion we may not have any difference of opinion as to the propriety of making a permanent provision for the widows and children; that it shall not be a charity left at the discretion of a committee who may gradually die away, who may leave the district, who may with difficulty be called together; but that the matter should be as far as possible, and it is possible, an allowance as a permanent and fixed little annuity to those who are left.⁹⁰

The motion was then carried. Langley was elected to the Committee, as was the pitman Thomas Weatherley. It was to be a temporary victory.

Four days later the Distribution Committee met for the first time. It was immediately proposed that Langley, 'having no connection to the coal trade', be voted off the board. Without the support of the pitmen Langley could offer little resistance and the motion was carried by seven votes to five.⁹¹ Numerous letters calling for the decision to be reversed were published in the paper, and there is no reason to suspect them of being false. Many even subscribed money only on the precondition that it was either Langley or Cowen who saw to its distribution:

Sir,—I beg to inform you that a meeting was held to-day by the workmen of the Railway Works, Gateshead, to consider the conduct of the committee appointed at the Guildhall meeting in rejecting you as one of the executive. We could not see what right they had to object to you, when it was thought by the pitmen at Burradon that you, and Mr. Cowen would know the requirements of the poor unfortunate sufferers better than any one else they

could think of; and so we agreed unanimously that the money subscribed in our works (about £50) is not to go into the general fund unless you and Mr. Cowen go out to Burradon and give immediate relief to the distressed, and distribute the money in the best manner you can, according to your judgement. Please give this a place in your columns and you will oblige,
 ONE OF THE WORKMEN WHO LIKES FAIRPLAY,
 Gateshead Railway Works, March 17, 1860.⁹²

Worse still, on 30 March, the *Chronicle* printed a letter from ‘A MECHANIC’ that claimed support for Langley was potentially a cause for dismissal and ‘so great is the fear of consequences owing to threats which have been held out in one factory that the men have determined not to make a public subscription at all.’⁹³

Clearly this situation could not go on. If funds were being withheld rather than given to the coal owners to distribute, and unemployment was the threatened result of donating to the paper, then any further opposition could only work to the detriment of the very people that Langley had sought to assist. On 5 April both Langley and Cowen therefore signed an editorial relinquishing any part of the subscription process: ‘For the sake of the sufferers of Burradon let the Executive Committee rather reign supreme than the fund be diminished one shilling.’⁹⁴ Shortly afterwards a letter complained that funds were now being distributed at the cashier’s office of the Burradon Mine. The last mention of the subject was the publication of a letter on 19 April 1860. It read:

DEAR FRIEND,—I beg to inform you that the poor weddows at Burradon has not received thare weeks monnay they have to wate a nother week they never got no notice but when thay went to the office there wase no money so thay have to live on one weeks monnay a fornigh and some of them are very bad of but the forst week that we received the forst money the priest at Benton church came the same day and gave us 6s. a pece and so they never gave us nothing for a week and 4 days ples publich it in the papers and let the publick know for thay all think that thay ar well of and a nother thing if every one if every one had a few pounds it wold help to put them in some way of doing but the way that they ar going on with us we have no chance exques my bad spelling so no mor from your freend
 BORRADON COLLIERY

i hop you will be a freand to us and the lord will be a one to you⁹⁵

In addition to instigating and publicising the need for immediate financial aid for the widows of Burradon, the *Chronicle* had run a campaign demanding a full and thorough investigation into the cause of the blast. To a man of Langley's political experience it was clear that the usual degree of scrutiny in the wake of pit accidents was inadequate.⁹⁶ The negligence of the pit owners, often present, was rarely acknowledged; an 1842 explosion at Mount Osborne Colliery in Barnsley, for instance, resulted in eighteen men being 'killed accidentally by firedamp'; at Burgh Colliery in 1846, eight victims of firedamp were pronounced 'accidental deaths'; and the 1851 explosion at the Ince Colliery in Lancashire, even after the coroner had admitted that 'The accumulation of gas in that wide tunnel was not only possible but also probable', concluded that the thirteen fatalities had been accidental.⁹⁷ Even when culpability was recognised, little action was taken. Before the disaster Langley had, through the *Chronicle*, detailed the 'Reports of the Inspectors of Coal Mines, to Her Majesty's Secretary of State'. Although acknowledging legislation existed to punish negligent owners, the 1859 Report admitted that 'the power and influence arrayed against any attempt of this kind makes it almost hopeless'.⁹⁸ Langley was determined this was not to be the case with the deaths of his friends. After each day of the enquiry the *Chronicle* reported on the speeches, questions and behaviour of all participants and added its own opinions as to the day's events.

Matters got off to a difficult start when Mr Stephen Reed, the Coroner for South Northumberland, adjourned the initial enquiry, reopening it a few days later with a different jury, mostly made up of Burradon pit employees, convened in the small offices of the pit officials. In the pages of the *Chronicle*, Langley accused Reed of being determined 'to hold his court at the colliery office, to refuse all cross-examination, and to close the enquiry as speedily as possible'.⁹⁹ The brusque and thoughtless manner in which the Coroner approached his duties led to a memorial being sent by the pitmen and, perhaps more effectively, by Mathias Dunn, a Government Inspector of Mines to the Home Secretary G.C. Lewis.¹⁰⁰ Lewis in turn wrote to the Coroner and ordered 'that the most searching enquiry should take place.'¹⁰¹ Even the conservative *Times* criticised the actions of the Coroner, concluding 'a more lame, and inconclusive investigation was never attempted to be made into such a fearful occurrence'.¹⁰² A contrite Reed later wrote to the *Chronicle* explaining that the second inquest was into the death of a single miner and unconnected to the larger investigation into the cause of the accident.¹⁰³ Even if true, the attitude displayed towards both Langley as a journalist and the Government Inspector of Mines reeked of hubris.

When the initial inquest into the cause of the explosion re-opened with the original jury a number of interested parties, employing legal counsel, were present. Mr H.L. Pattinson, a wealthy Newcastle metallurgist, Quaker and Fellow of the Royal Society, had hired the services of Sergeant Ballantyne, a prominent barrister from London.¹⁰⁴ Like Langley, Pattinson had attended the 10 April Guildhall meeting. In a vitriolic speech Pattinson had backed Langley's call for annuities for the widows and education for their families, but went further and suggested that

this whole meeting may be premature. Perhaps the meeting ought not to have been called upon to enter into a subscription when the owners of the colliery may be responsible for this calamity.¹⁰⁵

Mr B. Blackwell represented the mineworkers; and Newcastle solicitor Lockey Harle assisted Mathias Dunn, the Government Inspector of Mines.¹⁰⁶ The coal owners had hired Mr Ralph Park Philipson, who was both a solicitor and a mine owner, to represent their interests.

First to give evidence was Charles Carr, the pit's Chief Viewer. Having last visited the pit on 21 February, he swore that at Maddox's board:

The air traversing the district I have described was ample and sufficient for the place. We worked the whole boards with candles, and I considered it quite safe to do so.¹⁰⁷

When asked by the Coroner if any man had complained of the mine being in a perilous state he replied, 'Never.'

This was a lie. Langley had already published the testimony of three Burradon miners, William Urwin, John Carr and William Dryden, who on 19 January had led a delegation to their supervisor William Alderson and complained of foul air in the pit. Urwin and Carr had been persuaded to return to work and had both been killed in the explosion. Carr, who had taken several days off work, eventually returned after reputedly declaring, 'Lay the pit claes out, I'll go to work and we'll all be blown to h--- together'.¹⁰⁸ Dryden, who was later to give evidence, had been dismissed from Burradon for his actions and was by the time of the accident employed at another pit.¹⁰⁹ Another mine official William Kirkley was called to the stand and confirmed that the men had approached him with their complaints.¹¹⁰

Further artifice on behalf of the mine authorities was exposed when the plan of Burradon pit submitted to the court was shown to have been doctored.

Labelled 'Burradon Colliery Before the Explosion, March 1860' the map indicated double ventilation doors near Maddox's board, whereas there had been only single doors. Double doors had been erected rapidly after the explosion and the plans altered to reflect this change.¹¹¹ When questioned as to the time and reason for this alteration, William Kirkley was reluctant to answer:

Ballantyne: Who was sent off to Newcastle to alter this plan last Friday morning?

Kirkley: I don't wish to answer that question.

Ballantyne: You must answer.

Kirkley: Well, Sir, I am sure I don't know.

Charles Carr, the mine overseer who had ordered the alterations, was similarly evasive:

Carr: My object in putting up the double doors was in consequence of so many strangers coming into the mine after the accident and observing that the old door had been injured by the explosion.

Ballantyne: And for no other reason?

Carr: My intention was in future to take these doors away altogether.

Ballantyne: Then why did you build up a second door if you intended to remove them both?

Carr: I don't know. [Question was repeated twice.]¹¹²

The alteration of the plan was significant not simply because it showed a willingness on the part of the mine proprietors to deceive the jury but also because it suggested that they had suspicions that the mine was unsafe. Accusations were also made that the owners' solicitor Philipson had summoned an assistant to the miners' solicitor and warned him that if he continued to help the enquiry his family would be blacklisted. With a brother employed as a viewer this had been enough for him to remove himself from the case.¹¹³ Langley himself hinted he

had been the victim of ‘indirect annoyance and attempted coercion’ from the mine owners. But these being of ‘a purely personal matter to ourselves’, he did not expound upon the details.¹¹⁴

For his part, Philipson, representing the proprietors, attempted to prove that all possible safety precautions had been undertaken, that the mine had been inspected and declared safe the very morning of the accident, and therefore that the only cause of the explosion could be human error on the part of the workmen themselves. In particular he singled out a pony driver named Thirlwell, whom it was believed had left open a ventilation door (Thirlwell was so young that his testimony was considered inadmissible). Such an action might well have caused the build-up of gas in the main works, although as the door was supposed to be self-closing it would need to have been wedged open. Philipson also apportioned blame to the negligence of the miners in reporting their concerns regarding pit safety. Although several pitmen told the court that they feared for their lives, their concerns had been discussed only amongst themselves. There was undoubtedly truth in this accusation, but the case of William Dryden who had reported his apprehensions and been dismissed would seem to be explanation enough for their reticence. Similarly, on the day of the accident William Kirkley, one of the overmen on duty, had ordered the men back to work while another, William Alderson, had even used a stick to prevent fleeing boys from escaping and declared: ‘Lads, its no use going any further. All the harm that can be’s [sic] done now.’¹¹⁵ Such an attitude amongst officials would hardly have encouraged complaints.

Other than this, Philipson’s strategy included accusing witnesses of having been coached by Langley and constantly interrupting any line of enquiry that might prove unhelpful to the proprietors:¹¹⁶

Mr Blackwell: I am here, Sir, to say that injustice has been done to these poor men, and I intend to have this matter fully investigated. (Cheers from the assemblage.)

Mr Philipson: I asked the Coroner, as a matter of fairness—

Mr Blackwell: Now, don’t interrupt me again, Mr. Philipson.

Mr Philipson: Whether it was not proper—

Mr Blackwell: Now, don’t go making these insulting observations; you have grey hairs, and you ought to know better.¹¹⁷

At times this descended into absurdity; James Mather, a mine safety expert attempted to read from his report on Burradon. Philipson objected, stating that as Mather was on the stand as a witness, he was denied the privilege of using notes.¹¹⁸ On another occasion the Foreman of the Jury interrupted proceedings in order to request that Philipson be quiet.¹¹⁹

The verdict was given on 18 April 1860:

The jury say that the said William Wilkie [*sic*] on the 2nd of March, was killed by an explosion of gas in Burradon . . . caused either by a fall in the north return, or from Thirwell's door being left open; also there had been part neglect or oversight of some of the officials connected with the colliery; also the workmen in not complaining to the party for the state of ventilation.¹²⁰

No negligence on the part of proprietors was established and no prosecutions followed.

Now secure in their victory, the Newcastle Coal Board finally gave their response to Langley and the delegates (now mostly deceased) from the Miners' Provident Society.¹²¹ They had been asked to subscribe a penny for every 2½d. paid into the fund by the men. In the wake of seventy-six men losing their lives they had decided:

1. That, after taking great pains to ascertain, as nearly as possible, the sums paid on average annually by the owners of collieries in this district, in the shape of smart-money, allowances to widows and children, surgical attendance, aids to schools, chapels and churches, payments to schoolmasters and schoolmistresses, aids to the performances of religious services, and Sunday casual contributions, this committee find that, at present, the aggregate amount paid annually, under these heads, by the lessees of collieries, is fully £27,000, taking the average of years.
2. That this amount is, and has been for many years, paid voluntarily by the coal-owner . . .
3. That your committee cannot recommend that an arrangement like this, which has grown up gradually and as circumstances dictated, should be rashly interfered with.

An obviously bitter Langley placed the news under the heading 'Incredible Generosity of the Coal Trade', adding that he could imagine the hearts of the

owners 'bounding with irrepressible impulses of brotherly love, and beating indignantly lest the Miners' Provident Association should limit the sphere of their inexhaustible and incredible generosity'.¹²²

Langley had many reasons to be disappointed in the result of the inquest and his dismissal from the funding executive committee. But this should be viewed as only a partial defeat. Although the committee that had expelled him would distribute the financial donations as it saw fit, and do so from the offices of the mine itself, there was money to distribute. The amount amassed, the distance from which it had been collected and the alacrity with which the victims had received payment was due to Langley's exertions. Equally, although mine owner Joshua Bower had avoided liability for the deaths of sixty-eight men in his service and the Newcastle Coal Board had declined to support the very life assurance scheme that would have assisted the widows and orphans of the disaster, this was not a failure on Langley's part. Rather than a localised and easily forgotten tragedy, Burradon was, thanks to the persistent and extensive coverage of Langley's *Chronicle*, a topic of conversation across the country and a nationwide audience was more familiar with the perils inherent in the coal industry on which so much of Britain's wealth and power was built. The interest it inspired had an effect on the concurrent Coal Mines Regulation Act. The owners of Burradon had claimed that the disaster stemmed from a single boy leaving open a ventilation door. The Act's most notable stipulation was that a child of 10 or 11 years of age should be allowed to work in a mine only if they also attended school for two days a week. Although a small concession, it was a start.¹²³ In recent years the Burradon disaster has returned to the popular imagination. In an episode of the BBC genealogy programme *Who Do You Think You Are?*, British comedian Alan Carr discovered that he is a descendant of John Carr, one of the men brave enough to complain of the pit's ventilation and who had been killed in the explosion.¹²⁴ This was ascertained through the detailed and systematic coverage that Langley gave in the *Chronicle*. For Langley, the disaster at Burradon and the refusal of employers to accept liability had a lasting effect. He was to revisit such matters twenty years later through his work in the unionisation of the similarly vulnerable railway workers. In the meantime, he was to return to international affairs and, unlike his work on the *Stockport Mercury*, he was to take do more than supply a dissenting opinion. He was to take direct action.

Notes

- 1 'Mr. Langley's Farewell', *National Sunday League Record*, January 1859.
- 2 'Foreign Intelligence', *John Bull and Britannia*, 25 January 1858.
- 3 'The Shells Thrown at the Emperor Napoleon', *Morning Post*, 8 February 1858.
- 4 H. Hearder, 'Napoleon III's Threat to Break off Diplomatic Relations with England during the Crisis over the Orsini Attempt in 1858', *The English Historical Review*, vol. 72, no. 284 (July 1957), p. 475; Henry Hawkins, *The Reminiscences of Sir Henry Hawkins, Baron Brampton* (London: E. Arnold, 1904) p. 164.
- 5 , George Jacob Holyoake, George Jacob Holyoake, *Sixty Years of an Agitator's Life*, vol. 2 (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1892) pp. 24–25.
- 6 Joseph Cowen, 'Letter to G.J. Holyoake', 2 March 1891; *Bygones Worth Remembering*, vol. 1 (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1905) p. 187.
- 7 Holyoake, *Sixty Years*, p. 43; Hearder, 'Diplomatic Relations', *English Historical Review*, p. 476.
- 8 George Jacob Holyoake, 'Letter to Thomas Allsop', 7 June 1858. Rochester University/Thomas Allsop Papers/1815–1880/A.A44.
- 9 George Jacob Holyoake, 'Letter to Thomas Allsop', 28 June 1858, Rochester University/Thomas Allsop Papers/1815–1880/A.A44 (emphasis in original).
- 10 'Blaydon and Stella Mechanics' Institute—Annual Soiree', *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 19 July 1859. 'Blaydon and Stella Mechanics' Institute', *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 24 May 1859.
- 11 'The *Newcastle Chronicle* was Established in the year 1764', *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 1 January 1859.
- 12 'Destructiveness a Friend of Peace', *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 18 January 1859.
- 13 Aaron Watson, *A Newspaper Man's Memories* (London: Camelot Press Ltd, 1925) pp. 29–31. At the time of Cowen's purchase, sales of the *Daily Chronicle* had fallen to only 2,500 and the *Weekly Chronicle* about 2,000 copies.
- 14 'Poetry', *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 2 January 1859; Laurel Brake and Marysa Demoor (eds), *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism* (London: Academia Press, 2009) p. 446.
- 15 Watson, *A Newspaper Man's Memories*, pp. 43–44. Watson was to become editor after Langley's departure.
- 16 *Ibid.*, pp. 29–31.
- 17 'India a difficulty', *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 9 September 1859.
- 18 Robert Bickers and Christian Henriot (eds), *New Frontiers: Imperialism's New Communities in East Asia, 1842–1953* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000) pp. 16–18. 'The British Crown Disgraced in China', *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 20 June 1859.
- 19 'Public Strangling', *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 8 August 1859; 'Alas Poor Berwick', *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 24 November 1859.

- 20 Alan George Fryer, *The Burradon Mining Disaster 1860: A Detailed Account* (Northumberland, 1996) p. 9 <https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B8uwCkN5_X3UR1c2dktPN3A4YUE/edit> [accessed 12 August 2013].
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Fighting Against Slavery, 1861–1864

The outbreak of the American Civil War in 1861 inspired mixed feelings for many British subjects. Few were willing to defend openly the chattel slavery that was by this time a repellent anachronism, but abolitionists' hopes that the war would be fought over the issue of slavery were soon disappointed. Until Abraham Lincoln's announcement of the Emancipation Proclamation in the autumn of 1862, the United States' Federal government had failed to make abolition an immediate war aim.¹ In fact, the Lincoln administration had stated that the goal of the conflict was preservation of the Union, with the President declaring in his inaugural address of 4 March 1861:

I have no purpose, directly or indirectly, to interfere with the institution of slavery where it exists. I believe I have no lawful right to do so and I have no inclination to do so.²

Such vacillation cost the Union cause much good will amongst the British public and this combined with a widespread scepticism, especially during the early days of the war, about the possibility of the stated war aims being accomplished. Considerable doubt existed regarding whether the Federal forces—even were they to defeat the Confederate army in the field—had the ability to enforce the reunification of a people demanding independence. The blockade of Southern ports—legally questionable at the time—also had a terrible effect upon British industry.³ The loss of the cheap raw cotton that the South had provided resulted in factory closures, unemployment and widespread poverty.

Sometime between October and December 1861 Langley left the *Newcastle Daily Chronicle* and returned to the occupation of editor at the provincial newspaper the *Preston Guardian*. This was a regional newspaper primarily concerned with local issues and it is safe to assume that its articles, if not composed by Langley himself, were written with his sanction. Within its pages the concerns

expressed in his previous journalistic career were aired: in April 1862 the paper accused the local Conservatives of electoral bribery, and later that year it reported the execution of convicted murderer Mary Timney, a 27-year-old Scottish mother of four who had been dragged screaming to the gallows by William Calcraft, before an audience of 3,000 onlookers.⁴ By this time Langley was also a well-known and efficient political activist and was reported as attending and setting up an auxiliary branch of the Peace Society and speaking at a Unitarian Sunday School festival led by local clergyman W.C. Squier.⁵

As the centre of Britain's cotton manufacturing industry, Lancashire had relied on an abundance of cheap raw material, 80 per cent of which had been imported from the southern United States.⁶ The outbreak of civil war on 12 April 1861 led to an immediate blockade of Southern ports by the North and the sudden cessation of all such trade. Langley's first political campaign in Preston was to record, analyse and give publicity to the poverty this blockade had caused in the local area. He did this by recording carefully the level of charitable assistance given; in the week ending 22 February 1862, 5,094 loaves were distributed; the following week this had reached 6,170; by 15 March some 7,124; and by the end of April the number had again risen to 8,953 loaves distributed to the destitute.⁷ The failure of local companies and mill closures were also regularly reported. The *Preston Guardian*, and Langley personally, also campaigned for governmental action to find alternative sources of cotton and for increased monetary assistance to those thrown into part-time work or unemployment.⁸ By quantifying these statistics, the *Preston Guardian* was able to call for increased governmental support for the area.

Langley contributed personally to the campaign for the alleviation of this poverty by writing, producing and appearing in a piece of fundraising theatrical satire called *Nonsense*.⁹ With all profits being donated to local charities, the piece gave free rein to Langley's sense of humour and fulfilled his literary and theatrical ambitions but, as with most of his writing, it also contained political criticism. *Nonsense* commenced with a lecture by Langley on 'the nature of mirth', illustrated by anecdotes making fun of some British affectations that he viewed as ridiculous. These included the wearing of 'Chimney pot' hats by men, cockleshell bonnets by women and the 'peg trousers of the swells'.¹⁰ There followed a number of sketches in which Langley, along with two assistants from the Manchester Amateur Shakespeare Company, adopted characters for humorous, and political, effect. 'Tom Charterbox', for example, was a Chartist interrogator of two candidates for the electoral borough of 'Treachetown'. The Tory candidate was the Right Hon. Fitzcarliol Proudacre, a man so conservative that he preferred old cheese to new and who responded

to every question by promising that he would give it his ‘Considerwation’. His Whig opponent, Sir Positive Partyman, was little better. Promising to support any motion favoured by his party, he also declared himself implacably opposed to everything else. Although the quality of the performance was questionable, the opening night of a four-day run attracted some 900 to 1,000 paying customers, with ticket sales being donated entirely to the fund for distressed operatives.¹¹

Although expressing sympathy for the victims of the cotton famine, Langley—like his Newcastle associates Bright, Cobden and the late founder of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, Joseph Sturge (1793–1859)—was implacable in his opposition to the Confederacy. His sympathies he stated ‘were for the North, and he heartily hoped that whatever else may betide, this struggle would prove the downfall and permanent destruction of slavery.’¹² Langley was a member of the London Emancipation Society (LES) and he was to become a member of its General Committee too.¹³ The stated goal of the Society was

to make it everywhere perceived and confessed, by the force of indisputable testimony, that the South is fighting for the preservation of slavery, while the North is fully committed to the destruction of the inhuman system; and they therefore urge that Englishmen should encourage the friends of abolition in America by all the means in their power.¹⁴

The LES vied with groups that implicitly endorsed the Confederacy, such as the London Confederate States Aid Association, the Southern Independence League and James Spence’s Liverpool Southern Club, in its attempts to influence public attitudes.¹⁵ James Spence, a Liverpool manufacturer and ‘the most active, the most persistent, and the most effective of all the native group’, maintained a policy of targeting areas most affected by the embargo.¹⁶ Lancashire cotton towns such as Preston became battlegrounds in this ideological conflict with Langley through political campaigning and the *Preston Guardian* arguing against any recognition of, or assistance for, the slave-owning Confederacy. Other newspapers took the opposite stance. The *Sheffield and Rotherham Independent*, for example, remained staunchly opposed to the Federal cause. As with the organisations mentioned above, this was partly owing to a specific policy by Southern representatives to influence public opinion. Henry Hotze (1833–1887) and Edwin de Leon (1818–1891), both Confederate émigrés, employed a slush fund of \$25,000 to influence British newspapers

hiring seven British journalists to promote their cause.¹⁷ *The Times*, typically, called for the immediate recognition of the Confederacy with a correspondent questioning, in regard to slavery, whether ‘the results of setting man over man are more noxious than the degrading of man beneath Mammon’.¹⁸ He added that, within the South,

The vices which characterise the dealings of the master with the slaves are, however, largely mitigated by motives of interest, and sometimes, as in the case of Maryland especially, disappear, and the ownership assumes the gentler form of patriarchal authority.¹⁹

The weakness of the apologists’ case was that they did not dare claim that slavery itself was morally justifiable. Even the ardent Southern campaigner, James Spence, advocated gradual manumission.²⁰ The Confederate government’s refusal to countenance such action—especially after President Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation came into force (1 January 1863)—made such a position difficult to uphold. Langley exploited this by promoting the conflict as one explicitly between slavery and morality. In an 1862 editorial he declared:

England is called upon to pronounce whether she will lend her moral support to establish a new nationality, based upon the total enslavement of a large part of the population; she is asked to sanction by her friendship an infamous system, which, but a few years ago, she paid twenty millions to abolish, and which has cost her another twenty millions to restrain.²¹

There was no better means of promulgating such a message than the direct testimony of those who had endured the loss of freedom, and the same issue of the *Preston Guardian* advertised a speaking tour by the ex-slave James Watkins on the themes of ‘My twenty years suffering in slavery and how I was hunted down by the bloodhounds and taken back to bondage’ and ‘My sufferings in the wilderness; how I was hunted by the slave-hunters and protected by the Red Indians and my final escape’.²² The following month the paper publicised a play, *The Slaves*, in which a second escaped slave named Bennett related his own story of liberation.²³ In addition to editorialising, Langley participated directly in this activity. The most prominent ex-slave then in Britain was William A. Jackson, a former coachman for Confederate President Jefferson Davis. At a meeting in Sheffield on 10 January 1863, he addressed an audience more than 1,500 strong, said to be ‘mostly made up of workingmen now

suffering from the depression of trade', and later that year he joined M.D. Conway, John Bright and Langley himself to address large crowds at the London Tavern and Sussex-Hall.²⁴

It was through such campaigns that Langley, having left the *Preston Guardian* in December 1862, moved into his other major political activity of the early 1860s. This was the work of espionage on behalf of the Northern US government and the uncovering of Confederate efforts to construct warships in English ports. The Assistant Secretary to the United States Legation in London Benjamin Moran (1820–1886) wrote in his diary for Wednesday, 15 April 1863:

A few days ago one of the members of the London Union and Emancipation Society came and told me that one of their number, Mr. J. Baxter Langley would be very useful in ferretting out these pirate ships and wanted some money to send him down to Glasgow. I asked Langley to call here and he did so today. He thinks he can get some facts, and I will try and get Aspinwall and Forbes to employ him.²⁵ He is an active, intelligent person of about 35 years of age, 5 foot 10 inches high, has a slender, genteel figure, and is both good looking and very sharp.²⁶

Although Britain had adopted an official policy of neutrality it remained integral to the strategies of both Southern and Northern military planners. James Dunwoody Bulloch (1823–1901)—the Confederacy's chief foreign operative—sought through front companies and clandestine activity, to finance and commission ships in Britain for use as blockade runners, commerce raiders or even to attack and destroy Federal ships of the line. Similarly, his opponent, US Consul Thomas Haines Dudley (1819–1893) similarly engaged a network of covert employees to uncover and prevent such ships from being launched. This was made difficult by the widespread sympathy for the Southern cause then existing in industrial areas.²⁷ 'I am sorry to say,' Dudley complained to Secretary of State William H. Seward in April 1862, 'I see no improvement in the feeling of the people here toward the United States. I mean at Liverpool. They undoubtedly desire to see the southern confederacy established.'²⁸

Confederate loyalists were quickly joined by unscrupulous British businessmen in the export of vital supplies to the Confederacy and the importation of raw cotton on the return voyage. Although a danger of their being apprehended existed, the lucrative financial returns made the risk acceptable. Augustus Charles Hobart-Hampden in his book *Never Caught* (1867) gave the rate of pay

for a captain as £1,000 for each successful voyage, while another witness claimed that the profits for the owners on a single trip could reach \$150,000.²⁹ Fifty Federal vessels manned the cordon, but it covered 3,500 miles of coastline and nearly half of the blockaders were either awaiting decommission or were unseaworthy. In the early days of the war, especially, successful crossings were achieved in 96.8 per cent of attempts.³⁰ As late as 1864 blockade runners still evaded capture on an acceptable 72.2 per cent of trips, often by utilising British colonial ports in Bermuda or the Bahamas.³¹

With information provided by agents like Langley, Dudley reported back to the Federal government whatever details of such ships he could gather, whether steam or sail, paddle wheel or screw, external description, speed, suspected route and cargo and its owners and destination. These reports were forwarded to the commanding officers of the blockading squadrons. Similar reports upon the ships returning from Confederate ports gave information on the blockade's effectiveness and the amount of funds, garnered through the cotton trade, which the South could rely upon.³²

What made Langley exceptional was his motivation for joining Moran's organisation. Although the United States Consulate employed a number of professional investigators, Dudley acknowledged: 'They are not as a general thing very estimable men but are the only persons we can get to engage in this business, which I am sure you will agree with me is not a very pleasant one.'³³ He was later to complain that

you can only obtain [evidence] in one of two ways, persuasion or bribery. The first in a hostile environment like Liverpool, where every man who takes the side of the North or who would testify against the confederates is marked, if not persecuted, is almost impossible, and the last taints the evidence.³⁴

As a committed emancipationist Langley was motivated by ethical principles rather than the possibility of financial gain and, unlike many prospective working-class informants, was unconcerned by the threat of blacklisting. As an educated, respectable Englishman, he could mingle comfortably with the wealthy merchants and shipowners involved in financing the smuggling attempts, but his political activities had made him equally at home among working people. Langley not only visited public houses to engage locals in fact-finding conversation but also, according to a letter of 26 June 1863, would often visit several public houses in a single evening.³⁵ He was aware, through his newspaper work, of the workings of the shipping companies, but he also

possessed a detailed knowledge of the Mersey and Tyneside areas where the Confederates were making some of their most concerted efforts to purchase armaments.³⁶ Information that he garnered was immediately transmitted to Dudley in Liverpool and Langley also had frequent face-to-face meetings with the Consul. Although this work was secretive in nature, a series of letters between the two men survive, and these, combined with memoirs and letters written by the major participants, Moran, Dudley and the Confederates James Bulloch, Captain Raphael Semmes and James H. North, allow details of events—often unknown to Langley himself—to be reconstructed.

In April 1863, Langley, now employed by the United States government, was ordered to Scotland to investigate activity in the dockyards at Glasgow and Greenock. Whilst there he received reports ‘by the statement of workmen and others’ that there was at Dumbarton a vessel ‘built upon the same model as the *Japan* and for the same services’.³⁷ The *Japan*, an 1150-ton iron screw steamer, had been constructed in Dumbarton by William Denny & Bros in 1862. Renamed the *Virginia*, she had left the docks on 27 March 1863, ostensibly for a journey to Singapore, but instead rendezvoused with a small steamer named the *Alar* off the coast of France. There she was armed with two 100-pound cannons, two 24-pound cannons and one 32-pounder. Rechristened a second time as the *Georgia*, a Confederate flag had been raised, and the ship commenced a successful career as a commerce raider. In a seven-month cruise she sank five ships valued at \$191, 270 and bonded three others, costing the Federal government an additional \$240,000.³⁸

At a time of prodigious technological advance, the launch of such craft was of great significance. A single, state of the art, ironclad warship utilising screw-propeller propulsion, armed with rifled artillery and explosive shells could have devastated the Federals’ wooden blockade ships, and done so with impunity.³⁹ It could also have targeted Northern commercial shipping. The British-built *CSS Alabama*, the most successful of the Southern commerce raiders, captured or sank sixty-six prizes, and destroyed Union property in excess of \$4.6 million, more than eighteen times the cost of the ship’s construction.⁴⁰ The loss of trade, increase in insurance premiums and time spent in pursuit, further increased the financial impact of *Alabama*’s actions. It was imperative for the Northern war effort that no further ships of this type—or worse, a warship designed to challenge the blockade itself—reach Confederate hands.

After travelling to Dumbarton, Langley was able to confirm the ship’s similarity to the *Japan*. Further enquiries led him to the Bridge of Allan, on the River Forth, where ‘the parties are now residing who are supervising the

building of the rebel'.⁴¹ Here Langley set up quarters, believing it to be the hub of Southern plans. He was not mistaken. One of the two men being followed turned out to be Captain G.T. Sinclair, a Virginian and Commander in the Confederate Navy. The other was James H. North a Confederate naval officer recently arrived from France, where he had unsuccessfully attempted to purchase a French *Gloire*-class ironclad warship. (This was, arguably, the third most powerful warship—behind HMSs *Warrior* and *Black Prince*—at that time in existence. Were the Confederacy to prove successful in the purchase of such a vessel it would prove disastrous to the Northern war effort.)⁴² Now resident in Scotland, the two men were employed in the commission and construction of a screw steamer of 1,000 tons, 230 feet in length by 32 feet beam. As with all Southern ships she had a number of alternative sobriquets and was also known as 'Sinclair's Ship', later as the *Texas*, and finally as the *Pampero*. At the time Langley observed her, she was known as the *Canton* and was rumoured to be destined for China. A letter from North to J. Bulloch indicated how close the ship was to completion:

Bridge of Allan, April 4, 1863.

DEAR SIR: There is required for the building, arming and equipping of the Ironclad ship I am superintending the construction of £154,000 sterling.

Very Respectfully, etc,

JAMES H. NORTH
*Commander, C. S. Navy*⁴³

The *Canton* was very similar in design to the formidable *Alabama*, complete with a lifting screw to reduce drag whilst under sail, and a telescopic funnel.⁴⁴ The Confederate officer was not exaggerating when he stated in a letter of 2 May 1863, that 'she is the equal to anything our enemies may bring against her'.⁴⁵

North was also involved in the construction of two revolutionary warships, armed with revolving turrets, quick-firing Armstrong guns and underwater rams. These were given the names *El Tousson* and *El Mounassir* under the pretence that they were destined for the Egyptian government.⁴⁶ Throughout April, North was also in contact with the Elswick Ordinance works, in Newcastle-upon-Tyne for two 150-pound and two 12-pound cannon.⁴⁷

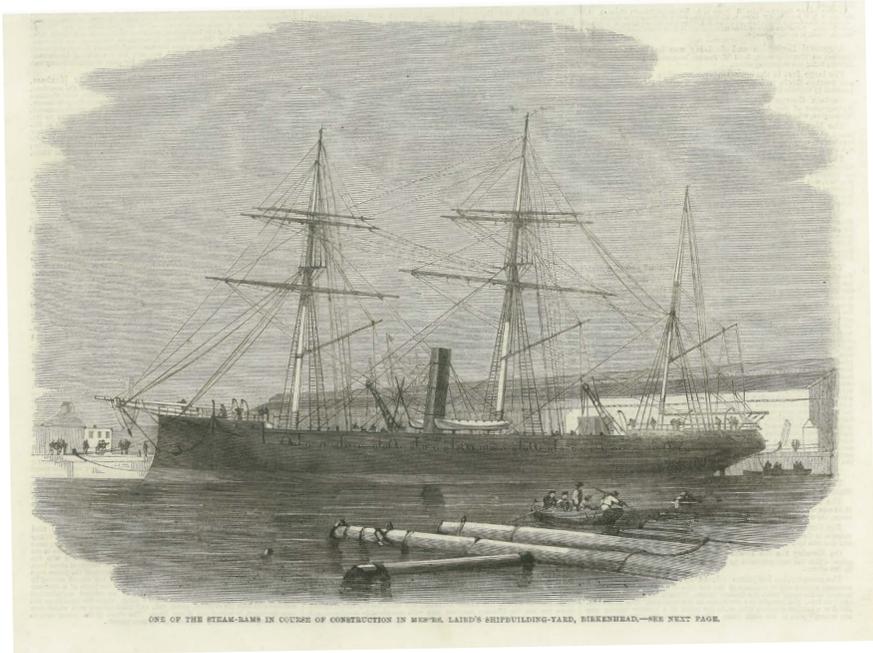


Figure 3: The Anglo-Rebel Pirates—Steam Building for the Rebels in the Clyde, Scotland [From a Sketch by an American in England] (*Harper's Weekly*, 17 October 1863, p. 661).

Realising the significance of Sinclair's and North's presence in Scotland, Langley devoted his time to observing and recording their every action. On 6 April 1863, he waited outside Glasgow railway station for the arrival of either man. It was a wet and dark morning, and although neither arrived on the first train, Langley attributed this to the poor weather and remained on watch. The second train saw the arrival of Sinclair who, after leaving the station, stopped at the coffee house of the nearby Imperial Hotel. Langley followed but entered instead the commercial bar and there questioned a waiter. Through this conversation he discovered that Sinclair and others were frequent visitors. Sinclair was then followed to the offices of Patrick Henderson & Co., George Street. 'The Gentlemen' of this company, Langley believed, 'have Southern proclivities'.⁴⁸ Again, he was not mistaken. The company was known to have links with William Shaw Lindsay (1816–1877), Member of Parliament for Sunderland, who had announced his intention of introducing a bill for the recognition of the Southern states and was suspected of laundering currency for the Southern cause.⁴⁹ A letter from James North to the company, dated 25 March 1863, indicates that he was at this time brokering the construction by James and George Thompson & Co. of 'armour plated ship building'. Patrick Henderson & Co.—acting as

intermediaries—were instructed to pay them £18,000; ‘being the amount of sixth instalment of armour plated shipbuilding by them for me’.⁵⁰ Further revelations followed. A number of intercepted Confederate despatches had referred to ‘Galbraith & Co.’. Such a company did indeed exist but would in no way have been capable of producing the required armour plating. But, as Langley discovered, a partner in Patrick Henderson was named Galbraith. ‘I am satisfied,’ Langley reported ‘that Galbraith & Co. is really Patrick Henderson & Co.’.⁵¹

Although Langley was careful to remain unobserved by North and Sinclair, he could soon report that he had seen them face-to-face and would ‘know them again under any disguise’.⁵² To assist him he had also hired a railwayman named J. Dewar who worked at the Bridge of Allan station. Dewar was a man ‘strongly opposed to anything being done which would be likely to involve England in a war with the U.S.’ and regularly reported to Langley the arrival and departures of the Southern conspirators.⁵³ On 4 May Langley reported to Dudley the personal addresses of both North and Sinclair and claimed to be travelling regularly on the same morning train to account for their actions. More audaciously, Langley had approached one of North and Sinclair’s junior officers. Posing as a surgeon who had ‘more than once thought of going over to the Confederate army but would prefer an appointment with a fighting ship’, Langley began conversing with one Major Middleton. Having thus ‘formed an intimacy with a man whose offensive personage I accept for the sake of his friends’, Langley then waited ‘for this seed to fertilise’. He did not have to wait long. During subsequent conversations, Middleton revealed that his superiors were currently ‘engaging men along the coast of Scotland’. The degree of personal dislike between the men, and Langley’s dedication to duty is shown by his promise to report further exchanges ‘if my patience be not exhausted’.⁵⁴

Although Langley and his compatriots were sure that the *Canton* was being built as another *Alabama* and destined for the Confederacy, reports in a local paper, the *North British Daily Mail*, refuted this. In an article on shipbuilding it reported:

Messrs Thompson are also building a screw steamer for an English House named the *Canton* and to be engaged in the China trade. She is a composite ship—that is built of wood and iron combined—and is already so far advanced as to be partially plated.

Her Length is 230 feet.
 Breadth 28”
 Depth 20”
 Engines 360 h.p.
 Tonnage 900 b.m.⁵⁵

This was a very different ship from the *Alabama*, which was 220 feet in length, nearly 32 feet across and 1,050 tonnes in weight.⁵⁶ If the paper was correct, then rumours of Confederate ownership were likely to be exaggerated. If the newspaper was wrong, then it suggested not only that the ship was destined for the Confederacy but also that Southern agents were actively misrepresenting the *Canton*. This meant that they viewed the ship as especially important and investigation by Federal agents was vital. Langley sought to uncover the truth not by the difficult task of viewing the craft directly but by use of his journalistic experience.

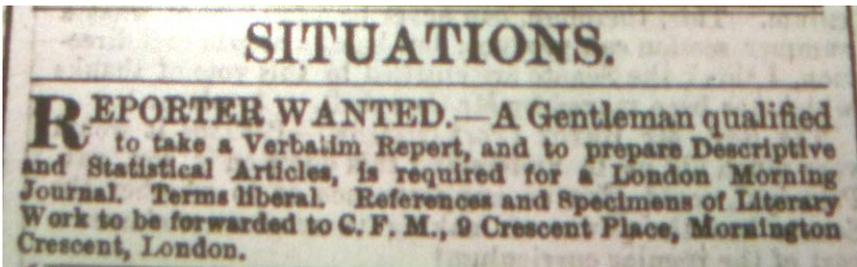


Figure 4: ‘Situations’ (*North British Daily Mail*, 30 April 1863).

This advertisement, placed by Langley in both the *North British Daily Mail* and also, ‘so as to ward suspicion’, in a rival newspaper, was published on 30 April 1863. Among the applicants intrigued by the ‘Terms liberal’ was the intended target, a journalist named Monroe. It had been Monroe who had penned the problematic description of the *Canton* in the *North British Daily Mail*. Careful not to reveal his true purpose for fear that Monroe ‘would blow our plans to atoms in the columns of his paper’, Langley continued with the pretence and interviewed the journalist for the imaginary position. It was to be a good-natured and illuminating conversation. Monroe, ‘over his whisky toddy’, disclosed that he had not personally inspected the *Canton*. He had instead taken down verbatim details provided by ‘the builders or the agents’ of the shipyard. To Langley the meaning of this was clear. He immediately informed his superiors that ‘The authorities in Thompson’s yard purposely and knowingly with the collusion of Monroe misrepresented for an obvious purpose the most remarkable vessel now building in the Clyde’.⁵⁷ By exposing this fraud he allowed the Northern underground to concentrate its efforts elsewhere secure in the knowledge that the *Canton* was indeed intended for a career as a Confederate raider.

Langley proved himself especially valuable in the Northern cause. In addition to the network of investigators that he had established, he could call upon many years

of radical campaigning and upon likeminded activists for assistance. Such contacts proved useful. The Stockton shipbuilding firm of Richardson & Duck, for example, had constructed several blockade runners. These included the infamous *Harriet Pinckney*, which had left London for Bermuda carrying a cargo of 24,000 rifles, eighteen cannon and was rumoured to carry 'an invention for destroying ships in harbour'.⁵⁸ The brother of one of the firm's owners, however, did not share Southern sympathies and when in 1863 the firm again embarked on a Confederate project he confided his concerns to a Newcastle Quaker named Wilson. Wilson passed the information to Langley who immediately informed his superiors and ordered the dockyard to be watched. Similar actions occurred in Greenwich, where Langley employed a local journalist P. Barnett, both to keep an eye on a wealthy Kentuckian named A.R. Johnston—believed to be involved in smuggling—and to watch for any attempts at recruitment in the area.⁵⁹

In addition to activities in Scotland and back in London, Langley was involved in exposing Confederate activity on Tyneside. Having already employed a Newcastle man, Richard Welford, he assured the US Consul on 10 April 1863 that he would 'be able to get on board every vessel launched in the Tyne'.⁶⁰ On 9 May, he travelled to the area with the aim of hiring a second man to watch 'Hartlepool, Middlesbro, and Stockton'. The man he found was William Milburn Blakiston a Middlesbrough engineer. Blakiston immediately took him to the dockyards of shipbuilders Pearse & Lockwood. There, Langley was shown the ship *Southerner*, which Blakiston believed to be destined for the Confederacy.⁶¹ Lloyd's register of 1863 shows the ship as owned by a J. Wilson and registered in Liverpool.⁶² Rumours—later confirmed—suggested that she had actually been commissioned by Liverpool merchants Fraser, Trenholm & Company. More than any other, this company had been integral in facilitating the Southern cause in Britain. Since the arrival of James Bulloch the firm had provided cash, credit and advice to the Confederate agent and few of the *Southerner's* successes were achieved without their invaluable assistance.⁶³ Such information was made more crucial by the fact that a Confederate official, Captain Matthew J. Butcher, had been spotted in the area and was suspected of hiring naval personnel for an imminent voyage.

Having seen the *Southerner*, Langley returned to Scotland leaving instructions for Blakiston to continue his surveillance. Blakiston returned to Stockton '4 or 5 times' and on 27 May, wrote to Langley confirming the men's suspicions. A series of holes had been cut on each side of the *Southerner's* bulwark 'about 18" square which they had closed up again with a hinged lid'. Moreover, 'When [Blakiston] saw her on Monday last one of those holes was open and pointing its nose out was a gun about 3" or 4" bore'. Blakiston had spent time

‘conversing with everyone I could get to talk’. Local shipyard workers had confirmed the presence of armaments and furthermore reported that the top deck cabins, which marked the vessel as civilian rather than military in nature, had been designed for easy removal. Blakiston also warned that ‘government inspectors have examined the ship and passed her’ and that she had been loaded with ‘a very large consignment of charcoal’. This was smokeless and allowed a warship to sail virtually unseen even under full steam. She was, Blakiston believed, to leave Teeside ‘some time next week’.⁶⁴

Langley immediately forwarded the letter to Dudley and proceeded to London where he conferred with William Evarts, an eminent attorney, and Assistant Secretary Moran. Moran recorded their meeting in his diary:

I have been busy and had a good many visitors. J. Baxter Langley called and reported having been on board a large steamer called the *Southerner* at Hartlepool, which there can be little doubt can be a privateer for the rebels. She is to have guns, has been built under Butcher the rogue who took the 290 to Terceira, and is carefully guarded to prevent her character and destination from being made public. I have requested Langley to go down to her again and get a disposition against her.⁶⁵

Reuniting with Blakiston, Langley proceeded to the shipyard of Pearse & Lockwood. From shipyard workers Langley was able to confirm that Captain Matthew J. Butcher was not only in Stockton but spent ‘the greatest part of his time in supervising the vessel’. It would be difficult to overestimate the significance of his presence: Butcher had served aboard the *Alabama* itself and although it had been another officer, Raphael Semmes, who committed the acts of piracy, it had been Butcher—whilst carefully keeping within the letter of the law—who had captained her and her civilian crew to neutral waters for armament.⁶⁶ It was also ascertained that many of the *Southerner*’s crew had previously served under Butcher, and thus the Confederacy. Although not mentioned in the letters to Dudley, Langley’s legal deposition also mentioned a workman’s claims that the *Southerner* possessed iron plating above the waterline that was ‘about 2 inches in thickness’ and his claim that it was common knowledge she was intended ‘as another *Alabama*’.⁶⁷

Langley found the works manager—a Mr Younger—similarly amenable to questioning. Accompanied by Blakiston, he was even able to gain access to the ship for over an hour. Here, they found the furnishings overtly, even ostentatiously, indicating Southern ownership. Windows were adorned with twin

circular ornamentation, one with the words ‘South Carolina’, a picture of the state’s symbolic palmetto tree, and the Latin ‘*animis opibusque parati*’ or ‘prepared in mind and resources’. The other window bore the inscription ‘*Dum Spiro Spero*’ or ‘while I breath, I hope’, the official motto of the same state, alongside a figure of ‘Hope presenting a cotton plant’. This, the great seal of South Carolina, had been attached to the Act of Secession in 1860. The sketch below is one made by Langley shortly afterwards, together with a modern reconstruction of the window:



Figures 5a and 5b: The Great Seal of South Carolina as seen and reported by Langley (J. Baxter Langley to Consul Dudley, 30 May 1863, DU2538).

Another window was decorated with a view of Charleston with both the Union Jack and Confederate flags flying from defensive towers. Porcelain fittings were adorned with the letters ‘CSC’, which Langley took as meaning ‘Confederate Screw Cutter’, again accompanied by a palmetto tree. Langley immediately forwarded the information to Consul Dudley in Liverpool. Although such evidence was convincing it was not conclusive. The *Southerner* was apparently destined for the South and could easily be converted for use as either a blockade runner or warship. But this did not prove that she was to be used in such a way. At the close of his letter, Langley wrote to Dudley: ‘I am deeply anxious to complete this case but I must admit that I am not as successful as I could wish.’⁶⁸

On 3 June the *Southerner* left Stockton, arriving in West Hartlepool later the same day to have a faulty compass recalibrated.⁶⁹ With little time remaining to prove the Confederacy’s intentions for the vessel, Langley abandoned clandestine observation and opted instead for more overt action. On Monday, 1 June, he again entered the shipyard of Pearse & Lockwood and requested to speak to Captain Butcher. Although the naval officer was absent, Langley was given directions to his dwelling. Here, he introduced himself as a writer researching

current shipbuilding techniques and asked, ‘would he have any objection for me, as a reporter connected to the London press, to go on board when she went on her trial trip from Hartlepool on Wednesday?’. The unsuspecting officer assured Langley that ‘I should not have the smallest objection but [did] not take charge of the vessel until she is quite complete’. Later that afternoon Langley again visited the dockyards, meeting with Butcher and another man that he believed to be either Lockwood or Pearse. He was introduced by Butcher and was invited to take a train to Hartlepool the following morning and, once there, board the *Southerner* for its trial cruise. He asked for and received Butcher’s card and was then invited to the aft cabin to join other visitors. A long conversation was then held, which Langley reported verbatim:

One of the ladies asked, ‘What was the meaning of the C.S.C. on the plates and dishes and basins?’ The gentlemen said that it was not known; that it might be ‘Charleston Steam Company,’ or ‘anything else’ and then laughed in a manner which led me to suppose that he knew more than he was inclined to tell. In reply to the same question Captain Butcher said that ‘it might mean Confederate Steam Company’ or Charles Spence & Company or anything else. He laughed when he said this in the same manner as the other gentleman had done.⁷⁰

Such was the Confederate’s confidence that photographic carte-de-visites were then distributed, showing Butcher in a naval uniform and Langley was able to purchase one. The uniform matched one that he had observed in Butcher’s quarters, ‘the cap, belt and buttons all bear the same stamp—namely—the palmetto with three letters below it—which letters appear to be K.C.E. or R.C.E. or possibly K.C.R.’.

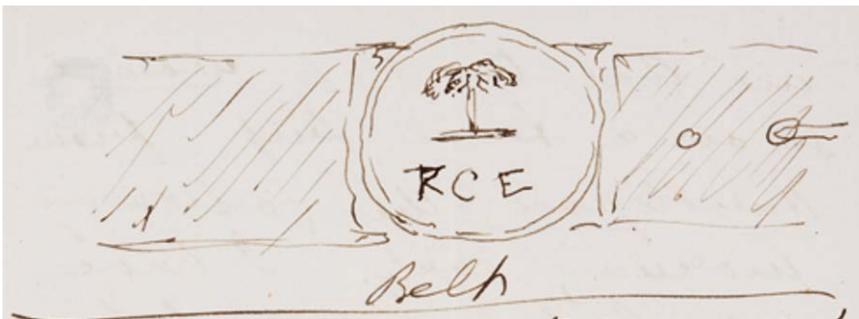


Figure 6: Belt buckle as worn by suspected Confederate seamen (J. Baxter Langley to Consul Dudley, 30 May 1863, DU2538).

Langley then arranged for the ship to be watched overnight and with Blakiston made an affidavit about their observations.⁷¹ Upon reading it, Benjamin Moran concluded that there was 'no doubt that she had been built for the rebels'.⁷²

The submission of Langley's affidavit effectively ended his ability to continue the investigation. Details of the case were soon leaked to the press. By 12 June, the *Liverpool Mercury* reported that 'a gentleman who represented himself to be a reporter from a London paper and who met with most courteous attention from the officers and crew of the vessel . . . it is now alleged . . . was a spy'.⁷³ Worse was to follow. On 20 June, the *Preston Chronicle* offered:

A word this week about Baxter Langley . . . the crafty, note-taking reporter, who 'did' the natives on the *Southerner* . . . he is, beyond all question, an arrant hypocrite, an un-English fellow, a creeping politico-maritime Jesuit, in the hands of a fanatical faction of men who haven't the pluck to do their own nasty work themselves.⁷⁴

Langley himself complained of being 'dogged on Saturday from W. Hartlepool to Stockton and followed almost everywhere', while newspapers reported that he had been 'met the other day by the Captain and a scene ensued'.⁷⁵

It is telling of Langley's motivations that it was only at this point that the US authorities offered him a salary. Moran reported: 'I to-day engaged Baxter Langley for three weeks at a salary of twenty guineas in full per week to go to Glasgow and learn what he can about the rebel rams. I think however the money will be thrown away.'⁷⁶ He was not mistaken. Recent events had made Langley's job impossible. In Glasgow he found 'no men working on the plates and very few at the woodwork on deck' of the rams. Worse, 'the men have all been warned to be reticent I believe for there is a marked change in their manner of speaking to a stranger'. In fact, 'from a conversation in the back parlour of one of the public houses where I went last night I inferred that it was understood that any man telling anything out of any of the yards would be refused employment anywhere else'.⁷⁷ Shortly afterwards, Langley seems to have abandoned his foray into espionage.

As a result of Langley and Blakiston's affidavits, a series of governmental inspections were carried out on the *Southerner*:

It appears the '*Southerner*' is an ordinary built iron screw-steam passenger . . . The Admiralty surveyor further reports that he finds, upon examination, that her topsides are of iron plates three-eighths of an inch thick, and are in no way fitted or secured for the

working of guns, and that she has two gangways fitted, one on each side for the purpose of working her cargo. The Surveyor in conclusion, says that upon fully examining the ‘*Southerner*’, he cannot find anything that with regard to construction that would leave him to suppose she was intended for belligerent purposes.⁷⁸

Another report by Joseph Laing, Mayor of Stockton came to a similar conclusion:

I do not believe from what I have heard, and also from my own observations, that she is in any way fitted out as a ship of war . . . I called at the photographers and saw the *carte de visite* of Captain Butcher, referred to by Mr. Langley, taken in the uniform of the Royal Naval reserve of which, I believe, he holds a commission. I may just notice that the portion of Mr. Langley’s deposition relative to the plates being about 2 inches thick. On this point his credulity must have been played upon as I never saw anything thicker than 3/4 or 7/8 inch plates, except where the strengthening plates are placed in addition to the ordinary ones, as required by the Liverpool underwriters for vessels of her size and class.⁷⁹

The testimony of James Bulloch was perhaps the most persuasive. The Confederate spymaster composed a detailed history of his efforts to build and launch warships to join the Southern war effort. In this he was quite frank about the true nature of vessels such as the Laird rams, *Alexandra* and *Japan*, but was dismissive of the *Southerner*: ‘No-one fairly inspecting her could have supposed that she would have been fitted up in that style if the intention was to convert her to a “privateer,” and her size and draft of water manifestly unsuited her for even blockade-running.’⁸⁰

If the *Southerner* was ever intended as a privateer or smuggling vessel, the publicity that Langley’s reports inspired prevented this. Although launched on 17 August 1863 she travelled not to South Carolina but to Algiers. There she acted as a cargo vessel and was reported to have carried 313 Turkish pilgrims from Alexandria to Malta en route back to Algiers.⁸¹ Three months later the ship was sold. Curiously the reason given for her sale was that ‘she could hardly pay expenses in the Mediterranean trade and there is no prospect of her soon being able to go into that for which she was built’.⁸² It remains unclear what the purpose ‘for which she was built’ might have been.

In a 2001 article Peter Barton raised the possibility that the *Southerner* was an elaborate deception calculated to expose and humiliate the Federal spy

network. There is some evidence to support this. The presence of Butcher on board was not only common knowledge, but photographs were available and, as Langley and Blakiston testified, neither shipyard workers nor the superintendent of works adhered to a code of secrecy. The overt Confederate ornamentation throughout the ship left no doubt as to its allegiance. The very name *Southerner* demanded suspicion and it would be surprising if the combined features failed to result in intense scrutiny.⁸³ If this was the case then Langley was duped. But it seems unlikely that the Confederacy would allocate sufficient capital to fund such an expensive conspiracy. James Bulloch makes no mention of such a scheme. Nor does this explain Butcher's angry reaction when later meeting Langley. If Langley had been deliberately deceived, someone would have surely boasted of the fact.

It seems probable that Langley was, understandably, convinced that the ship was intended for the Confederacy and military purposes. It must be remembered that neither Langley nor Blakiston had previous experience in matters of espionage. Although much indicated the Southern sympathies of the ship's owners, evidence for a future military purpose was less conclusive. Langley's report of two-inch armour plating came not from personal observation but from a dockyard employee. Likewise, although Blakiston had reported gun ports on the ship's bulwarks and even the nose of a cannon protruding, he had detected those through booking frequent passage on a ferry that passed the dockyard. It is likely that the *Southerner* was commissioned under the assumption that when launched the embargo against the Southern ports would have been broken. The sudden influx of American cotton enabled by either Confederate recognition, European intervention or negotiated settlement (even the unlikely event of outright Confederate victory), would have made a ship such as the *Southerner*—both fast and able to carry large cargos—immensely profitable.

Although the exposure of Langley as an employee of the US government effectively ended his investigations into Confederate shipping, a small post-script remains. On 17 November 1864, the *Liverpool Mercury* began a series of reports on a suspected 'Federal Kidnapping' aboard the ship the *Great Western*. A number of men from London and Manchester had been hired to travel to New York for employment at an 'extensive glass works'. The paper believed the men were in fact destined for the Northern military and called for intervention under the Foreign Recruitment Act. The case hinged upon the testimony of two men, T.D. Whillock and William Fenton, both said to be 'very respectable looking' and 'highly intelligent'.⁸⁴ The men had completed affidavits that they had been promised lieutenant's commissions on arrival but, being unimpressed by the state of the ship in which they were to travel, had instead

reported the matter to the police. They also reported that correspondence between themselves and their prospective employers was to be sent ‘Care of J. Baxter Langley, Esq. 50 Lincoln’s-Inn-Fields’. One of the men, Fenton, also claimed to have been advised to join the ship by Langley. Despite the paper’s furious accusations and a short investigation, after a brief detention the ship was allowed to leave Liverpool unmolested.

As with the *Southerner*, the alleged attempt at Federal recruitment led to vitriolic attacks upon Langley:

It is possible the late editor of the *Preston Guardian* was ignorant of the purpose for which the men were wanted, in which case though innocent himself he has suffered the consequences of keeping bad company; but remembering how he, not long ago, stooped to become a spy and informer on behalf of the Federal government, we have little faith in him.⁸⁵

It is conceivable though that Langley was merely holding mail for the recruiters, or that he was attempting to aid men—most of whom were reportedly near destitution—to find a better standard of living abroad. It is doubtful if the full story will ever be known.

Langley’s active opposition to Southern chattel slavery yielded mixed results. Through the *Preston Guardian* he eloquently argued that the suffering of Lancashire workers was intrinsically linked to that of the American slave. To make such a case whilst living amongst those adversely affected by the Northern embargo took considerable skill and courage. As a member of the General Council of the London Emancipation Society he continued to organise the battle for British public opinion. Debate moved from a war fought by foreign combatants, to its effects upon the living victims of Southern oppression, many of whom were often present in Britain and able to relate their own irrefutable tales of personal tragedy. But though many Victorian Britons censured the slavery then present in the Confederate States, Langley was one of a far scarcer breed that took personal and individual action to influence the outcome of the war. In this, he sought no personal aggrandisement or financial reward, but only tried to do what he considered ethical and virtuous using skills he knew few others possessed. That the *Southerner* may well have been intended for commercial rather than military service is of little importance. The concerted effort by men such as Langley to prevent the construction of warships averted a full-scale challenge to the blockade and the resultant economic advantage that this would have given the slave-owning states.

Notes

- 1 Duncan Andrew Campbell, *English Public Opinion and the American Civil War* (Suffolk: Royal Historical Society, 2003) p. 17.
- 2 Abraham Lincoln, First Inaugural Address, 4 March 1861, cited in Henry Louis Gates, Jr, *Lincoln on Race and Slavery* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009) p. 215.
- 3 R.J.M. Blackett, *Divided Hearts: Britain and the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001).
- 4 'Execution of Mary Timney', *Preston Guardian*, 3 May 1862. See also Langley's detailing of Calcraft's botched execution of William Bousfield, *Morning Star*, 18 April 1856.
- 5 Blackett, *Divided Hearts*, p. 108.
- 6 D.P. Crook, *The North, The South, and the Powers, 1861–1865* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1974) pp. 205–06.
- 7 'The Nonsense Entertainment', *Preston Guardian*, 19 April 1862.
- 8 'Africa', *Preston Guardian*, 15 February 1862; 'The African Blockade', *Preston Guardian*, 15 February 1862; 'Town's Meeting on the Indian Tariff', *Preston Guardian*, 22 February 1862.
- 9 'Nonsense', *Preston Guardian*, 15 March 1862.
- 10 'Nonsense', *Preston Guardian*, 8 March 1862.
- 11 'Mr. Langley's Entertainment', *Preston Guardian Supplement*, 1 March 1862; 'Nonsense', *Preston Guardian*, 8 March 1862.
- 12 *Preston Guardian*, 14 June 1862.
- 13 The London Emancipation Society had, until Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, been known as the London Emancipation Committee.
- 14 'The Newly Formed Emancipation Society', *Illustrated London News*, 6 December 1862.
- 15 James Paul Cobbett, *An Answer to the Manchester Southern Club or Southern Independence Association* (London: Abel and John Heywood, 1863); Anon, *An Address to the British Public and all Sympathizers in Europe from the London Confederate States Aid Association* (London: R. Phillips, 1862) <www.jstor.org/stable/60235566> [accessed 4 March 2012]; 'Belligerent Rights at Sea', *Leeds Mercury*, 13 December 1862; Blackett, *Divided Hearts*, pp. 62–64; Campbell, *English Public Opinion*, p. 67.
- 16 Douglas H. Maynard, 'Thomas H. Dudley and Union Efforts to Thwart Confederate Activities in Great Britain' (Unpublished PhD Thesis: University of California, 1951) p. 31.
- 17 Blackett, *Divided Hearts*, p. 144.
- 18 'To the Editor of *The Times*', *The Times*, 14 November 1861.
- 19 *Ibid.*
- 20 Maynard, 'Thomas H. Dudley and Union Efforts', p. 31.

- 21 'North or South—With Whom Shall We Sympathise!', *Preston Guardian*, 1 February 1862.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 'Negro Emancipation', *Daily News*, 17 June 1863.
- 25 John Murray Forbes and William H. Aspinwall, had made fortunes in US railway construction. They had been sent by Lincoln in 1863 either to prevent the launch or to purchase the two confederate warships ships being constructed in Scotland and known as the 'Laird Rams'.
- 26 Benjamin Moran, 28 May 1863, in Sarah Agnes Wallace and Frances Elma Gillespie (eds), *The Journal of Benjamin Moran*, vol. 2, 1863 (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1948) p. 1146.
- 27 Maynard, 'Thomas H. Dudley and Union Efforts', p. 36. Two of Liverpool's MPs, for example Thomas Horsefall and John Laird, both Conservatives, were strongly pro-South, the third at best neutral.
- 28 Thomas H. Dudley, Letter to US Secretary of State William H. Seward, 26 April 1862, cited in Maynard, 'Thomas H. Dudley and Union Efforts', p. 18.
- 29 Joseph McKenna, *British Ships in the Confederate Navy* (North Carolina and London: McFarland & Co., 2010) p. 217.
- 30 Ibid., pp. 203–05.
- 31 Ibid., p. 205.
- 32 Maynard, 'Thomas H. Dudley and Union Efforts', p. 55.
- 33 Thomas H. Dudley, Letter to William H. Seward, 11 December 1861 (No. 59), *Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Liverpool, England, 1790–1906* (National Archives Microfilm Publication M141, roll 20), General Records of the Department of State, Record Group (RG) 59, National Archives at College Park; Kevin J. Foster, 'The Diplomats Who Sank a Fleet—The Confederacy's Undelivered Fleet and the Union Consular Service', *Prologue Magazine*, Autumn 2001, vol. 33, no. 3 <www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2001/fall/confederate-fleet-1.html> [accessed on 12 March 2012].
- 34 Thomas H. Dudley, Letter to William H. Seward, 4 September 1862. Cited in Maynard, 'Thomas H. Dudley and Union Efforts', p. 92.
- 35 J. Baxter Langley, Letter to Thomas H. Dudley, 26 June 1863, Inventory of Thomas Haines Dudley Collection 1843–1891, Huntingdon Library, California (hereafter DU) 2541.
- 36 A report in the *Morning Star*, for example, relayed information that '2 more of the mortar boats contracted for Mr John Laird, ship builder of Birkenhead, were launched on Saturday, from the building yard of that gentleman on the Lancashire shore of the Mersey.' This was the same company that was to produce the infamous 'Laird Rams' whose very existence caused concern amongst the Union naval commanders.
- 37 J. Baxter Langley, Letter to Consul Dudley, 10 April 1863, DU258.

- 38 McKenna, *British Ships*, pp. 152–57; Spencer Tucker (ed.), *The Civil War Naval Encyclopedia, A–M* (California: ABC-CLIO, 2011) p. 257.
- 39 Coy F. Cross II, *Lincoln's Man in Liverpool: Consul Dudley and the Legal Battle to Stop Confederate Warships* (DeKalb IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2007) pp. 89–91. Attempts were also made to have iron plating produced in England, matching scale drawings of ships already constructed and sent to the Confederacy. This reduced construction time and, more importantly, in no way violated the Foreign Enlistment Act.
- 40 Tucker, *Naval Encyclopedia*, p. 8.
- 41 J. Baxter Langley, Letter to Consul Dudley, 10 April 1863, DU258.
- 42 Warren Berry, *The Pre-Dreadnought Revolution: Developing the Bulwarks of Power* (Stroud: The History Press, 2013) p. 98.
- 43 The Hon. Edwin Denby, Secretary of the Navy and Colonel Harry Kidder White (eds), *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1922) p. 399.
- 44 McKenna, *British Ships*, pp. 162–63.
- 45 James T. North, Letter to Hon. John Slidell, 12 May 1863. *Official Records*, p. 413.
- 46 McKenna, *British Ships*, pp. 166–68.
- 47 James H. North, Letter to G.W. Rendel, Esq., 22 April 1863, *Official Records*, p. 408.
- 48 J. Baxter Langley, Letter to Consul Dudley, 6 April 1863, DU257.
- 49 Marika Sherwood, 'Perfidious Albion: Britain, the USA, and Slavery in the 1840s and 1860s', *Contributions in Black Studies*, vol. 13, Article 6, 1995, p. 186.
- 50 *Official Records*, James H. North, Letter to Patrick Henderson & Co., 25 March 1863, p. 394.
- 51 J. Baxter Langley, Letter to Consul Dudley, 6 April 1863, DU257.
- 52 J. Baxter Langley, Letter to Consul Dudley, 4 May 1863, DU2532; J. Baxter Langley, Letter to Consul Dudley, 9 May 1863, DU2535.
- 53 J. Baxter Langley, Letter to Consul Dudley, 4 May 1863, DU2532.
- 54 J. Baxter Langley, Letter to Consul Dudley, 4 May 1863, DU2532.
- 55 'Messrs Thompson', *North British Daily Mail*, 27 April 1863.
- 56 Tucker, *Naval Encyclopedia*, p. 7.
- 57 J. Baxter Langley, Letter to Consul Dudley, Date Unknown but on or around 30 April 1863, DU2531; J. Baxter Langley, Letter to Consul Dudley, 4 May 1863, DU2532.
- 58 Arthur Wylie, *The Confederate States Navy* (online) 2007, pp. 115–16. Consul Morse wrote two letters to Secretary of State Seward warning him of the fact.
- 59 J. Baxter Langley, Letter to Consul Dudley, 9 May 1863, DU2535.
- 60 J. Baxter Langley, Letter to Consul Dudley, 10 April 1863, DU2528; *J. Baxter Langley to Consul Dudley*, 26 April 1863, DU2529. Emphasis in original.

- 61 The ship was named both *Southerner* and later *The Southerner*. Letters between Langley and Blakiston, and Langley and Dudley use the terms indiscriminately. The name *Southerner* will be used for future descriptions.
- 62 Alan Bettenev, *Shipbuilding in Stockton and Thornaby* (Stockton-on-Tees: Tees Valley Heritage Group, 2003).
- 63 Full details of the company's activities can be found in Francis Hughes's PhD thesis, 'Liverpool and the Confederate States: Fraser, Trenholm and Company Operations During the American Civil War' (University of Keele, 1996).
- 64 W. Blakiston, Letter to J. Baxter Langley, 17 May 1863, DU228.
- 65 Wallace and Gillespie (eds), *Journal of Benjamin Moran*, p. 1168.
- 66 McKenna, *British Ships*, p. 80.
- 67 J. Baxter Langley, Letter to Consul Dudley, 30 May 1863, DU2538; J. Baxter Langley, 'Deposition of J. Baxter Langley', *The Case of Great Britain as Laid Before a Court of Arbitration Convened at Geneva*, vol. 2 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1872) pp. 238–39.
- 68 J. Baxter Langley, Letter to Consul Dudley, 30 May 1863, DU2538; J. Baxter Langley, *The Case of Great Britain*, pp. 238–39.
- 69 Bettenev, *Stockton*, p. 67.
- 70 J. Baxter Langley, 'Deposition of J. Baxter Langley', *The Case of Great Britain*, p. 240. Langley's deposition stated that Butcher replied, 'It may mean Confederate Steam Company', but his earlier letter to Dudley reports it as 'Charleston Steam Company', which would seem more likely.
- 71 J. Baxter Langley, Letter to Consul Dudley, 1 June 1863, DU2359; J. Baxter Langley, *Deposition of J. Baxter Langley. Subscribed and declared at Stockton in the County of Durham, this 2nd day of June, 1863, before me, Joseph Dodds, a Commissioner to Administer Oaths in Chancery, in England*.
- 72 Wallis and Gillespie (eds), *Journal of Benjamin Moran*, p. 1170.
- 73 'The Alleged Confederate Steamer Southerner', *Liverpool Mercury*, 12 June 1863.
- 74 'Everyday Gossip about Anything and Anyone Anywhere', *Preston Chronicle*, 20 June 1863.
- 75 J. Baxter Langley, Letter to Thomas H. Dudley, 7 June 1863, DU2540; 'The Alleged Confederate Steamer Southerner', *Liverpool Mercury*, 12 June 1863.
- 76 Wallis and Gillespie, *Journal of Benjamin Moran*.
- 77 J. Baxter Langley, Letter to Thomas H. Dudley, 26 June 1863, DU2541.
- 78 Report of Mr T. Hobbs and Mr W. Byrne to Controller of the Navy, 23 June 1863, cited by James Bulloch and Thomas Yoseloff (eds), *The Secret Service of the Confederate States in Europe* (London: Richard Bentley & Son, 1883) vol. 1, pp. 353–54.
- 79 'Joseph Laing, Letter from to Earl G. Grey, June 6, 1863', *The Case of Great Britain*, p. 194.
- 80 Bulloch, *Secret Service*, p. 355.

- 81 William L. Dayton, US Minister to France, Letter from to Captain Winslow of USS Kearsage, 25 September 1863, cited by Bettaney, *Stockton*, p. 69.
- 82 *Ibid.*, p. 70.
- 83 Peter Barton, 'Was *The Southerner* a Confederate Corsair, a Blockade Runner, or an elaborate Hoax?', *The American Neptune*, vol. 61, no. 4, Autumn 2001, Salem, pp. 423–28.
- 84 'Alleged Kidnapping for the Federal Army', *Liverpool Mercury*, 18 November 1864.
- 85 'The Re-Election of Mr. Lincoln', *The Preston Chronicle*, 26 November 1864.

Demanding the Franchise, 1858–1869

Through the whole of the nineteenth century, the most enduring campaign for both middle- and working-class radicals was that of electoral reform and the extension of the franchise.¹ Langley had spoken on the subject as early as 1853; indeed, he was to call not only for universal male suffrage but for the franchise to be extended to include women, putting him amongst the most radical of reformers.² But the opportunity to take a leading role in the campaign did not present itself until 1858 when an editorial in the Chartist newspaper the *People's Paper*—written by veteran campaigner Ernest Jones (1819–1869)—proposed a conference.³ The goal of this conference was to find common ground between middle-class reformers such as Langley and the working-class activists of the Chartist movement.

The result of the conference was the formation of the ill-fated and short-lived Political Reform League. This was designed to include both working and middle-class reformers; the executive council consisting of six of each.⁴ Ernest Jones took a leading role, having already been appointed as the sole member of the Chartist executive; he was also voted one of the middle-class representatives of the Political Reform League's executive.⁵ Langley was also elected to the executive and, on the recommendation of Jones, was also designated Treasurer. Having campaigned alongside Jones in the months preceding the conference in matters related to the Orsini case, it is likely that both the formation of the organisation and their respective roles within it had been discussed beforehand.⁶ With the executive selected, the first order of business was to promote the organisation through a series of metropolitan and provincial lectures. Delegates to the Chartist conference agreed to raise £100 to facilitate this. An editorial in the *People's Paper* asked, 'Chartists! I beg of you not to delay this.'⁷

Langley's involvement with Ernest Jones has been of some interest to scholars of Chartism. Such an alliance was a *volte-face* for Jones who had previously complained:

There is eternally among parts of our body [of Chartists] a hankering after rubbing skirts with the middle class. What have we to gain by a union with the capitalist class? Their influence, which many urge as desirable, is the very thing I dread. It is their friendship not their enmity, that we fear.⁸

Langley is often portrayed as a *dilettante* or worse, a cynical manipulator of Jones. In his biography *Ernest Jones, Chartism, and the Romance of Politics, 1819–1869*, Miles Taylor claims that Jones ‘had to put up with running the Political Reform League alongside Langley’ who was a ‘political moderate’ and ‘one of the less likable figures’ that Jones was forced to deal with.⁹ There have even been suggestions that Langley had bribed Jones to change his viewpoint. Certainly, some Chartists believed this, and Jones was said to have received letters addressed ‘Earnest [*sic*] Jones B.B.B.L. or Bought By Baxter Langley’.¹⁰

Superficially the two men had identical desires for the new organisation. In reality their differences were enough to doom it. Jones viewed the Political Reform League as a means to gain respectable support for the Chartist cause. Middle-class reformers were to join the pre-existing network of working-class agitators and together they would put pressure on the government. But it would be under Chartist leadership, and thus under Jones’s own authority. As he stated on 20 February 1858, ‘the Chartist body hold the paramount power in all Reform agitations, and that all other parties are necessitated to come to them for support and aid’.¹¹ Langley had very different goals. As part of the defence campaign for Thomas Allsop and the opposition to the Conspiracy to Murder Bill, Langley had worked alongside some of the most renowned and influential radicals of the period—Charles Bradlaugh (1833–1891), George Jacob Holyoake and Joseph Cowen had all been his close associates. It was through the eloquence and experienced leadership of such men, he believed, rather than through the weakened and factionalised Chartists, that reform could be achieved. The differences became apparent by 13 March, when Langley—acting as Treasurer—posed a question over the movement’s future finances: £100 was to be raised as a result of the conference, but was this to be Chartist money, or was it to be employed for the necessary foundation of the Political Reform League? Jones’s *People’s Paper* printed his query:

As I like others to be Manly and straightforward with me, I do not wish to conceal my opinions on this question. It seems to me that if two movements are to go on at the same time both will fail to have the firm strength they ought to have.¹²

Jones took the opposite view and wished the monies to be expended upon his own Chartist movement:

The £100 fund was voted by a Chartist Conference for Chartist purposes. It will be raised by Chartists, and we exhort them not to invest their funds in any political movement but the CHARTER.¹³

To make matters worse, Jones was in dire financial straits and the *People's Paper* was on the verge of bankruptcy. Jones had the misfortune to take on the role of newspaper proprietor at the very time interest in Chartism was waning, consigning him to a constant, and often desperate, struggle to maintain circulation.¹⁴ Rumours of financial impropriety had also surfaced leading to a bitter court case with rival newspaper owner G.W. Reynolds.¹⁵ In a 13 March editorial Jones admitted to his followers that 'I am now in a position that I can neither hold out myself, nor produce another number, of the paper, unless you interpose to save me and it'.¹⁶ Jones was quite specific about the amount needed: 'I should say less than £150 would not place me in safety, but less than that (about £80) would meet all the immediate exigencies of the case.' Money was forthcoming (albeit less than Jones had requested), and the *People's Paper* continued publication. Despite such problems, a fortnight later Jones proposed the launch of a sister publication the *London News*, four pages in length and costing a penny—launched on 8 May 1858.¹⁷ Commercially this was a mistake and soon afterwards Jones was again in difficulties and turned to Langley for assistance.

Langley, by now with considerable experience of journalistic procedure, had previously expressed an interest in purchasing the two Chartist papers.¹⁸ Jones, having assured him that the business was profitable and making £5 per week, proposed the price of £250. The sale had not eventuated when Jones announced fresh financial difficulties, but Langley came to his aid by offering a loan of £64. Jones promised to pay the sum back within six weeks, using the *People's Paper* and the *London News* as security. When Jones was unable to refund the money, he was forced to announce:

My previous losses and present difficulties prevent me keeping it in the field without assistance. That assistance I have been unable to obtain and, as a last chance, I mortgaged the two papers and my country business to Mr. Baxter Langley, of the *Morning Star*, for immediate and temporary assistance. Finding that I could not extricate myself, I offered him my entire business and papers, which he has purchased.¹⁹

Amongst Jones's supporters, the loss of the paper he had founded aroused suspicion. It was felt that Langley had taken control through financial skulduggery. In fact, rather than exploit Jones's use of the two newspapers as security, a second financial deal had been agreed between the two men. In addition to the monies already expended, Langley added £190. Although £50 of this was 'by means of an acceptance at twelve months', this brought the purchase price to slightly over the £250 originally proposed by Jones.²⁰ Both men appeared content with the transfer; Jones assured his readers that Langley had behaved 'in a most fair and honourable manner'.²¹ Langley was equally keen that this should not be viewed by readers as 'the act of a grasping usurer—but that of one who would not willingly let the Chartist organ die'.²² To placate Jones's Chartist supporters, and Jones himself, Langley also guaranteed Jones two columns in which to detail the latest Chartist activity, 'as long as *The People's Paper* shall be issued'.²³ In fact, when one of the papers supporters—'W'—proposed the founding of a company designed to return the papers to Chartist hands through the selling of £1 shares, Langley not only printed his letter but 'indicated his willingness to take 100 shares, and, if continued in the editorship, 250'.²⁴

It was at this point that the diverging priorities of the two radicals became apparent. Jones had used the *People's Paper* as the platform of the Chartist movement and, as its avowed spokesperson, for his own views on political matters. Langley, being involved in a broader range of political campaigning, envisaged the *People's Paper* as a vehicle for disparate radical movements to interact, cross-pollinate ideas and offer mutual assistance. While Jones remained a regular contributor, Langley added a second column, 'Chartist Free Quarters' airing dissenting views that Jones saw as counter-productive. Simultaneously, being the organ of the more middle-class Political Reform League, the paper contained reports from separate but allied groups such as the Northern Political Union, the National Political Union, and various democratic clubs. Langley's other campaign of the period—the cause of the National Sunday League—also held a prominent column, as did the activities of Friendly and Co-operative Societies and Working Men's Colleges, alongside the latest news of the struggles in Poland and Hungary against Romanov and Habsburg tyranny. Langley could even 'admire the earnestness with which the TEMPERANCE CAUSE has been advocated' and provide space for the movement though he admitted 'in minor matters we must agree to differ'.²⁵

Matters came to a head when Langley printed a letter in 'Chartist Free Quarters' that was highly critical of Chartist leadership.²⁶ Jones viewed the presence of the letter in a Chartist-aligned paper as an attack upon his integrity

and a personal insult by Langley.²⁷ To further complicate matters, there had been a mistake in transcription. Where the letter had mentioned that ‘Daniel O’Connell knew of the conspiracy’, in the newspaper O’Connell’s name had been replaced with that of Jones’s late mentor, Feargus O’Connor (1794–1855). Although Langley admitted the mistake, Jones saw this as a deliberate provocation and the inclusion of the letter as an attempt to lessen his influence.²⁸

From this point onwards, the *People’s Paper* was home to near constant vilification, accusations of dishonesty and invective. Jones claimed that Langley sought to ‘sow division in our ranks’ and ‘destroy the committee meetings of the Political Reform League’.²⁹ Further, he asserted that ‘such dishonest, cowardly and dirty conduct I never met in public before’.³⁰ Langley was ‘base and treacherous’; ‘cowardly; and ‘a cowardly knave and trickster’.³¹ Langley responded by printing letters undermining Jones’s accusations. Nor was the dispute confined to the newspapers. Langley had planned to lecture at the (historically) Cheshire town of Stalybridge. Hearing of this Jones ordered the local Chartists to stay away, warning that ‘I feel bound to say that all political connection must cease between myself and any Chartist locality inviting Mr. Langley’.³² When Jones repeatedly demanded a public meeting to air his grievances, Langley dismissed the request. To ‘display the contemptible schisms of Chartists before any public meeting’, he felt, would only make matters worse.³³ If Jones were to provide him with specific accusations, however, he offered to write a defence and submit it to a committee elected by London Chartists.³⁴ Other than this, Langley responded only through the letters column. Three of these are perhaps sufficient to illustrate both the level of distrust, pettiness and abuse between the former allies.

In July 1858, Jones accused Langley of offering to publish Chartist meetings within the *London News* ‘by way of a bribe’. This he viewed as an attempt to usurp his authority as they should have been advertised in his own column:

The Lambeth Chartist locality has, in an unfortunate moment, been induced to send its report to Mr. Langley, instead of to me. The result is that the *Chartist* report is smuggled into the *Political Reform League* columns. This is dishonest. Let it be a warning to other places.³⁵

Langley either solicited or simply received a supportive letter from W.H. Clifton, of the Lambeth Chartists, who replied:

The meeting he [Jones] refers to, was not a Chartist locality meeting, nor was it held at the locality rooms, but a simple discussion in a public hall, open to the world, and the question only affecting the support which the people, not the Chartists only, should, or should not give to the League. The report was sent in a direct manner to its legitimate place, and not 'smuggled in the League columns'.³⁶

Jones's accusation, according to Clifton, was 'either a wilful perversion of the facts or was written in ignorance of the real facts'.³⁷ Immediately afterwards he too became a target of Jones's ire:

As to Mr. Clifton, I am not surprised at his conduct. He who once exhibited towards me abject and disgusting servility, when he wanted a service, which I rendered with great difficulty, is just the man to abuse and vilify, when he thinks he can gain more in another quarter. I advise the London Chartists to keep a close eye upon Mr. Clifton.³⁸

Langley was also accused of having deliberately sabotaged Jones's ambitions to stand for the seat of Greenwich.³⁹ On 21 August 1858, Jones wrote:

Mr James Beaton, a gentleman of property and a sterling democrat had promised to subscribe to my Greenwich Election Expenses but was induced to withdraw his promise, on Mr. Langley's persuasion—this gentleman telling him not to subscribe—that I had no chance—that I was always looking into Election Expenses, and that he had best keep his money in his own pocket.⁴⁰

The following week Beaton wrote to Langley:

Sir,—Having learned that my name has been used in a personal matter between you and Mr. Jones, it is my wish that you publish my declaration that I have never heard you speak in any disrespectful manner against that gentleman, nor was I induced to withdraw my subscription from Mr. Jones in consequence of anything you have said with reference to his candidature at Greenwich.—I am
Sir, yours

JAMES BEATON.⁴¹

Beaton joined Langley and W.H. Clifton on Jones's list of enemies:

If the letter is genuine Mr. Beaton is a liar, either in what he said before or what he wrote in the letter.⁴²

Finally, on 21 August, the *London News* reported:

The sham Italian Borromeo, who was known in the North of England, as M. St. Hilaire, and lectured in various places as a democrat, has been sent to four years penal servitude for bigamy.⁴³

There was an element of *schadenfreude* in Langley's report of this case. Count Carlos Borromeo, a supposed Milanese nobleman, had been hired by Langley when employed at the *Daily Star*. Borromeo had provided detailed reports on the London meetings of exiled European radicals and, in particular, of a conference of Italian expatriates. His employment had ended when one of Langley's Irish co-workers had remarked how strange it was that the Italian nobleman spoke with such a pronounced Cork accent. In fact, Count Carlos Borromeo—also known as Henry Charles Smethwick; Alexander Charles Borromeo; the Marquis Marco Emile de St Hilaire; and Dr Charles Tucker—had never been to Italy and the conference of exiles was entirely fictitious. The publicity that ensued had motivated Borromeo's *wives*—Mary Anne Sadler (whom he had married and abandoned in 1842); Anne Maria Frogett (whom he had married in 1847); Mary Murray (whom he had married sometime later); and a fourth woman (who believed herself married as she had signed 'a piece of parchment in a foreign language')—to come forward.⁴⁴ Langley and the police subsequently tracked the unfortunate charlatan to a theatre in Reading where he was lecturing on the science of 'electro-biology'.

Jones was furious that the bigamous trickster had been linked with Chartism:

The motive is apparent. Every effort is made to bring Chartism and the Chartists into discredit. The libel is utterly inexcusable. Borromeo was not in any way connected with the Chartists body—not as much as he was with Mr. Langley, who employed him to report.⁴⁵

The following week Langley either procured or received a letter undermining Jones's accusations. An attendee of Borromeo's lectures supplied an eyewitness account:

Borromeo, under the name of De St. Hilaire, lectured frequently as an *avowed* *Chartist* in many towns in Lancashire, and the West Riding of Yorkshire . . . to Chartist audiences, in Chartist meeting rooms, and was not disavowed by the Chartist body, until his swindling practices were discovered.⁴⁶

But by far the most damaging accusation raised against Langley was that he had swindled Jones out of the *People's Paper* and the *London News*. Although previously Jones had reported that Langley had 'acted in a fair and honourable manner', on 21 August, he published a retraction and in the columns of the *People's Paper* gave a very different account of the transaction:

Mr. Langley, some weeks before the purchase took place, offered to buy the property. I did not decide on the proposal then, but ultimately offered *The People's Paper* and *The London News*, and my country newspaper business, which brought in a net profit of five pounds per week, for £250. Mr. Langley verbally agreed, — and I relied on him. But, after promising that sum for the business, — after, in reliance on him, I had neglected all other means and resources, after even deciding on the terms of the agreement, a draft of which had been approved by him, Mr. Langley, tore it up before my face, and I found myself suddenly left without means for buying paper and paying for machining, to bring the paper out. Relying on Mr. Langley, I had neglected all other resources, and was treated thus! Mr Langley then agreed to supply the paper and machining, and pay thirty pounds, if I mortgaged to him the two papers and my country business, to be forfeited to him, if not redeemed in one week . . . I solemnly believe, and conscientiously aver, that the mortgage would have been foreclosed, and the whole property wrested from me, for £64, had I not said, that in such a case, I would expose the fact to the Chartist body, call on them to rally around, and help me to avenge so unfair a transaction.⁴⁷

Jones claimed that if Langley had not indulged in such underhand dealings he could have been a wealthy man, as the *London News* alone, he believed, 'had I time to look around and take advantage of "the market" might have fetched £1,000'.⁴⁸ Jones further alleged Langley had stipulated—without prior discussion—that if he were to purchase the papers Jones was forbidden to contribute elsewhere for a period of five years (Jones was to write for the

Cabinet Newspaper from 1858 to 1860, so if this clause was included it was certainly not enforced).⁴⁹

Purchasing a potentially lucrative newspaper at a time of financial weakness was certainly not unheard of. Joseph Cowen was to acquire the *Newcastle Daily Chronicle* for little more than monies already owed to him.⁵⁰ But if the papers were such profitable ventures it remains unclear why Jones should have found himself in such desperate financial straits in the first place. Jones's claims of financial security remain questionable, although his dedication and selflessness in the cause of his Chartist beliefs is not.⁵¹

Unsurprisingly, Langley decided to end his association with the *People's Paper*. Initially he offered to return it to Jones for the sum of £100.⁵² Jones printed his reply in the next edition:

Mr. Baxter Langley.

I hereby make the offer known to the Chartist body, and request their consideration of the matter, and that the reply may be sent to me forthwith. At the same time I cannot conscientiously recommend the Chartists to entertain the proposition.

Ernest Jones.⁵³

On 4 September, in a pyrrhic victory for Jones, Langley announced that there would be no further issues. The *London News* continued for a further nine issues before sharing its counterpart's fate. In the final issue, Langley wrote:

It is with feelings of pain and anxiety that I pen these lines to those who have supported me in my undertaking entered upon in good faith by me, and which had been, to the best of my ability, carried out in a spirit of conciliation to all . . . The first result of my becoming the proprietor and conductor of *The People's Paper* and *London News* was the loss of my situation at the *Morning Star* office, which was worth more to me than even the stated income arising from the whole business bought by me. I say 'stated' because the result proved that income arising from the various sources indicated was a myth. I lost thus a certain annual income, and almost at the same moment discovered the business I had purchased involved a weekly loss also. This weekly loss has been reduced steadily by increasing income, and carefully reduced expenditure; but I find that from the

24th of June to the 24th of October I have suffered a pecuniary loss to the extent fully of £700, in addition to the loss of a valuable situation, with the advantage of considerable influence attached to it.⁵⁴

Having closed down the second newspaper, Langley's proprietorship was over. The Political Reform League lasted little longer than did the *London News*. Jones's loyalty to his Chartist organisation had effectively starved the organisation of funds, telling supporters to 'keep their pence exclusively for Chartist purposes, and give only their suffrage to the League'.⁵⁵ For Langley personally, the contest with Jones had been more than a financial catastrophe. From 1858 onwards there are continuing mentions of failing health. The *London News* of 6 November 1858 reported that he was 'prevented by illness' from attending a meeting of the Political Reform League.⁵⁶ The *National Sunday League Record* of January 1859 spoke of Langley's 'precarious health' the previous December. On 20 February 1862, Langley called a meeting requesting that Lord Palmerston repeal the tariff on exports to India. Langley 'regretted that the state of his health prevented him accompanying the memorial'.⁵⁷ This ill health was to continue until the 1870s and the close of his political and public career. Despite this, immediately after the closure of the *London News*, Langley left the capital to commence a lengthy tour of Scotland on behalf of the National Sunday League and shortly afterwards relocated to the more welcoming environs of Newcastle and employment on Joseph Cowen's *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*.

With the failure of the Political Reform League and continuing decline of Chartism, popular agitation for franchise extension decreased. Lord John Russell attempted in 1860 to bring in a Reform Bill, but was forced to withdraw, admitting: 'the apathy of the country is undeniable. Nor is it a transient humour; it seems rather a confirmed habit of mind.'⁵⁸ This can be overstated, however, as independent pressure groups, particularly in the North of England, remained active. Langley attended meetings of Joseph Cowen's Northern Reform Union and numerous smaller, localised organisations such as the York Reform Association, the Bristol Reform Union and the Leeds Working Men's Parliamentary Reform Association remained active.⁵⁹ But distrust between middle and working-class reformers and—most importantly—disagreement as to the degree of reform desired, prevented any unified extra-parliamentary activity. Trade unionists, for example, were wary of aligning themselves with the radical MP John Bright, especially as the Rochdale pioneer opposed legislation to limit the hours of adult workers in textile factories and favoured only a restricted extension of the franchise to adult male householders.⁶⁰ The need

for an organisation that would appeal to the working class, whilst remaining attractive to wealthier reformers remained.

Now based in Newcastle, Langley spent much of his time involved in foreign campaigns. In 1860, for instance, he was forced to defend himself against a lawsuit for his, and the *Chronicle's*, support for the Italian nationalist Giuseppe Garibaldi, after a number of pieces of advertising appeared:

GARIBALDI EXCURSION TO SOUTHERN ITALY. — A select party of English excursionists intend to visit South Italy. As the country is somewhat unsettled, the excursionists will be furnished with means of self-defence, and, with a view of recognising each other, will be attired in a picturesque and uniform costume. Gen GARIBALDI has liberally granted the excursionists a free passage to Sicily, and Italy, and they will be supplied with refreshments and attire suitable for the climate. Information to be obtained at Capt. Edward Styler, offices, No. 8 Salisbury-street, Strand, London.⁶¹

This scarcely veiled invitation for military volunteers infuriated George Crawshay (1821–1896), the Mayor of Gateshead, who brought an unsuccessful suit against Langley for breach of the Foreign Enlistment Act.⁶² As a close associate and financial backer of the Scottish activist David Urquhart (1805–1877), Crawshay saw Italian nationalism as an impediment to a united European opposition to Russian imperialism. Garibaldi he viewed as a participant in ‘illegal and unjust wars’.⁶³ Having not directly enlisted the volunteers—only advertised in a newspaper—Langley was acquitted.⁶⁴

Although seemingly unconnected to parliamentary reform, such campaigns led to an increased working-class involvement in wider libertarian issues.⁶⁵ In 1863—at the height of the American Civil War, for example—London trade unionists held a rally in support of the Northern states and the emancipation of those held in slavery within the Confederacy. In the same year in Liverpool, a ‘numerous and highly respectable’ meeting was held to express sympathy for Polish independence (a general uprising having taken place in the Russian-ruled kingdom of Poland).⁶⁶ The following year, a pro-Garibaldi meeting was dispersed and its leaders attacked by police.⁶⁷ This led to the formation of the Universal League for the Elevation of the Industrious Classes, which—within a year—had given birth to the more focused National Reform League and to the revival of the Trade Unionists’ Manhood Suffrage League.⁶⁸ Langley had been prominent in the Garibaldi campaign; it was therefore a natural step for him to return to the campaign for suffrage reform.⁶⁹

The movement immediately incurred derision in both Parliament and the pages of the Tory-aligned press. These insisted that there was neither desire nor need for further reform. Langley was singled-out personally:

London heard of a novelty or, rather, of a dead thing resuscitated, on Saturday evening. This was a public meeting convened by the National Reform League, to promote 'manhood suffrage' and 'vote by ballot' . . . what would the public learn, for example, if we told them that among those who wearied the St. Martin's Hall audience on Saturday night until there were scarcely enough left to cheer the chairman, we observed Mr. Merriman, Mr. Leno, Mr. Bradlaugh and Mr. Baxter Langley. It is a remarkable fact, however, that the working classes are always in the hands of these people. Totally insignificant in themselves, rehearsing their speeches in tavern parlours—always with the same shallow platitudes upon their lips, and blinded by false ideas of their own importance.⁷⁰

Despite such attacks, the League tapped into a revived and growing interest in democratic principles. This coincided with the appointment of the pro-reformist Lord John Russell as Prime Minister (29 October 1856) and, in 1866, with the presentation of a new Reform Bill.

Whilst seemingly a victory for the reform movement, this also raised problems. Russell's Bill was modest in its goals and it offered an increase of only 400,000 new voters, with barely half coming from the working classes.⁷¹ This was far fewer than the Reform League—or even the more moderate National Reform Union of John Bright—had demanded. Although any increase in the franchise was welcome, for men such as Langley, who had worked towards a unification of working and middle-class radicals, Russell's measures were problematic. To abandon the principle of universal suffrage in favour of a Bill that enfranchised such a small percentage of working people would not only be a personal act of hypocrisy but would also be seen as a betrayal by the very reformers that Langley had planned to work alongside. But to oppose such a Bill—especially as the newly enfranchised voters would inevitably make further reform more achievable—would play into the hands of the Conservative opposition.

Langley's difficulty is shown in two meetings held in Greenwich in 1866. Langley had, by this time, stood unsuccessfully for the parliamentary seat, although he retained a close affinity with the area (see Chapter 9). On 7 April 1866, he spoke at a meeting of Woolwich Arsenal workers protesting that,

under clause 16 of the new Bill, government employees such as themselves risked disenfranchisement.⁷² Langley joined them in opposing the section. Four days later he attended a second, pro-reform meeting in the area and was forced to express an opposing view. When an amendment was raised that ‘no Bill was satisfactory that had for its object the disenfranchisement of the dockyard’, he responded that ‘It was disgraceful to say “because the dockyard men are not provided for, you must sacrifice the whole for the interests of a part”’.⁷³

Despite the compromises made in supporting the Bill, Langley was disappointed. An alliance between the Tories and a group of anti-reform Whig backbenchers—known as the ‘Cave of Adullam’—defeated both the Bill and the Liberal administration that had proposed it (Russell resigned on 28 June 1866).⁷⁴ For Langley, the action of the backbenchers was unforgivable. In addition to his activity with the Reform League, he made a scathing attack on the two leaders of the Adullamites, Lord Elcho and Robert Lowe, through a satirical one act play *The Trial of John Workman: At the Suit of Lord Coronet, on the Information of Robert Verrilow Low, (Lately returned from a Convict Settlement,) Before John Bull Fairplay*.⁷⁵ The piece introduced a buffoonish cabal of vested interests, including industrialist Sir Millionaire Moneybags; landowner Dreary Broadacres; and a clergyman the Reverend Willbyforce Oxon. Most prominent, however, are the two pantomime villains, Lord Coronet and Robert Verrilow Low. These are barely concealed caricatures of the real-life Adullamites. During a court case brought by the two villains, the noble British Workman was accused of being ‘venal, ignorant, drunken and corrupt’. This pointedly paraphrased the actual Commons address of Robert Lowe, during which he had argued that reform was beneficial only ‘if you want venality, if you want ignorance, if you want drunkenness and facility for being intimidated’.⁷⁶ In summing up, the character of the Judge expressed Langley’s disgust towards the two men:

You, Robert Verrilow Low are sufficiently marked with public infamy to be deprived of all chance of regaining your character in society, and the loss of the offices for which you have condescended to such treachery and deception is no doubt very humiliating to you, but the cruelty and wickedness of the charges you have made will stand against you on all future occasions . . . You will have to appear in another court, perhaps, before a far higher judge; and may God have mercy upon you and your class when that hour of retribution comes.⁷⁷

Outside the theatre Langley remained active in the pro-reform movement. Sensing rising popular anger over the Bill's rejection, the Reform League became more strident in its approach. The day after the Adullamites' rebellion had forced Russell's resignation, and his replacement with a minority Tory government under Lord Derby, Benjamin Lucraft led a 1,000-strong procession, accompanied by red flags and a brass band, from Clerkenwell to the West End. Here a further 10,000 supporters awaited them.⁷⁸ Five days later, Langley and other Reform League executives addressed 80,000 demonstrators in Trafalgar Square.⁷⁹ Emboldened by these successes the League proposed:

That a great National Demonstration in favour of Reform be held in Hyde Park on Monday afternoon, July the 23rd at 6 o'clock precisely and that the various branches of the Reform League and other reform associations throughout the country be invited to attend and take part in the proposed demonstration.⁸⁰

The legality of such a move was debatable. Police were empowered to remove trespassers from any royal park but their authority and, indeed, their ability, to treat thousands of organised and peaceful protestors in similar fashion was questionable. In fact, the demonstration was seen not only as a demand for electoral reform but also as a defence of the right of assembly.⁸¹ Nevertheless, five days before the demonstration the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, Sir Richard Mayne, notified League President, Edmund Beales, that the meeting was forbidden:⁸²

Such a meeting—being inconsistent with the purposes for which the park is thrown open—is illegal and cannot be permitted; and such an assemblage there of large numbers of persons is calculated to lead to riotous and disorderly conduct, and to endanger the public peace.⁸³

After due consideration, the League determined to challenge the ruling. On the appointed evening a large procession marched along Oxford Street to Marble Arch, led by a carriage bearing Beales and another League Executive, Lieutenant-Colonel Dickson. A sizeable crowd had gathered outside the park to watch proceedings. When the men arrived, they found police guarding the gate in a half-moon formation.⁸⁴ The police had orders to prevent the demonstration entering the park and that

Any person attempting to deliver any speech or address, or to discuss any popular or exciting topic, is to be cautioned that he cannot be allowed to do so; and if he persists after such caution he is to be removed out of the park and the persons forming the meeting told to disperse.⁸⁵

As Beales approached, the police drew their truncheons en masse.⁸⁶ Having demanded, and been denied, entrance a scuffle broke out during which a mounted officer, '32V', either deliberately, or simply by losing control of his horse, wheeled round and 'backed' his mount into the League men.⁸⁷ Having been prevented physically from entering the park, Beales and Dickson returned to Trafalgar Square.⁸⁸ Although some 15,000 of the assembled crowd accompanied them, between 50,000 and 200,000 remained. Langley was either among them or had used his middle-class respectability to gain access to the park previously. Descriptions of what occurred next vary, but at some point the railings along Park Lane gave way, either—as *The Times* maintained—through 'a forcible breaking into the park' or—as Robert Applegarth recalled—through simple weight of numbers and 'without any aggressive move on the part of the people'.⁸⁹

Once the gates had fallen crowds surged into the park, where:

The police charged in the most savage manner. They cut open the people's heads with their truncheons, the young and the aged being served with equal brutality and fury. At first the people were stunned. But the assault of the police had produced the usual effect. Blood had been drawn, men's passions were roused, and with an extraordinary determination the unarmed populace resisted the charges of the *gens d'armes* and drove them back.⁹⁰

Overwhelmed, despite their liberal use of force, the police found themselves attacked in turn with paving stones and sticks. Even the arrival of the military failed to calm the situation. When two troops of Horse Guards and two companies of Foot Guards appeared with fixed bayonets, the crowd—saving its animosity entirely for the police—cheered them as 'the people's guards'.⁹¹ Extended skirmishes between the police and demonstrators continued for several days.

It would have been easy for the authorities, backed by the Tory press, to dismiss this as a simple riot, rather than the political actions of a frustrated and disenfranchised populace. Indeed, this was their initial reaction. Disraeli,

newly appointed as Chancellor of the Exchequer, spoke of the disturbances in the Commons the following day. His opinion was that ‘however loyal and sensible’ had been the genuine demonstrators, their cause had been usurped by outside agitators, and become ‘the occasion of a gathering of the scum of this great city, as he regretted to say had been the case’.⁹² *The Times* backed this version of events:

The great majority of the people in the crowded streets were the usual, slouching, shambling man-boys, who constitute the mass of the ordinary London multitude.⁹³

Trewman’s Exeter Flying Post also denied any political aspect to events at Hyde Park:

The working men (and they did not exceed a score) seemed to be tailors, shoemakers and labourers. There was not a respectable mechanic among them . . . it was just such a crowd as you see returning from an execution at Horsemonger Lane, the same in their riotous behaviour, foul language and ominous appearance.⁹⁴

What undermined this argument was the fact that once inside the park, much of the crowd had gathered to hear Langley, accompanied by fellow executive member, coach-builder and future Nobel laureate, William Randal Cremer (1828–1908), hold a lengthy and well organised meeting.⁹⁵ Langley, who both addressed the protestors and acted as the meeting’s chairman, began by observing that

the people of England had shown by their conduct on that day that Sir Richard Mayne, or any other official like him, could not deprive them of the rights for which their fathers’ bled. He was proud of the conduct of the people.

He went on to say:

The people are loyal, enthusiastically loyal, but they will not have it thrown in their teeth that the reward for their loyalty is to be crushed down by the batons of policemen when they seek to hold a constitutional meeting in a Royal Park.⁹⁶

Two resolutions were then proposed—the first:

In the opinion of this meeting held in Hyde Park on the 23rd of July, 1866, in despite of Sir Richard Mayne's foolish proclamation, the threats of the police, the military, and Mr. Walpole, the Home Secretary, the conduct of the Tory government in trying to prevent this meeting is an outrage upon their rights.

And the second:

That this meeting do protest against the cunning and treachery by which the Tories defeated the Reform Bill, and did the people out of their rights.

Langley then led a 20,000 strong procession to Trafalgar Square, the crowd singing as it went a verse from the Union song 'John Brown's Body' adapted for the occasion:

We'll hang Sir Richard on a sour apple tree,
 We'll hang Sir Richard on a sour apple tree,
 As we go marching on.
 Glory! Glory! Hallelujah!
 As we go marching on.⁹⁷

In the wake of the Hyde Park demonstration the prestige and authority of the League was so much enhanced that a delegation—Langley amongst them—visited the Home Secretary, Spencer Walpole, and offered to assist with the restoration of order on condition that both police and military were withdrawn.⁹⁸ Walpole was said to have been 'close to tears' when he agreed.⁹⁹ Further demonstrations were immediately organised. On 30 July 1866, the League gathered 25,000 supporters at the Agricultural Hall, Islington.¹⁰⁰ On the same evening, Langley addressed 'a body of working people entirely unconnected to the Reform League', but said to be between 10,000 and 12,000 strong, in Victoria Park.¹⁰¹ The following day he addressed 6,000 supporters of George Potter's reformist London Working Men's Association.¹⁰² Although there was some suspicion between the Reform League and the Association, Langley was warmly received. He began with the greeting:

Fellow roughs! (Great Laughter) Yes, in demonstrating for a large measure of reform you are doomed to be called 'roughs,' I am glad to be in your company. (Cheers.)¹⁰³

In response, the trade union organisation proposed:

That the best thanks of this association are given to Mr. Baxter Langley for his taking the chair at a meeting last Monday evening last, in defiance of the police authorities, and thus practically vindicating the right of the people to hold a meeting in the park.¹⁰⁴

Large-scale demonstrations followed. Those in the North, in particular, were amongst the largest that England had witnessed since the decline of Chartism.¹⁰⁵ More than 200,000 people attended a reform meeting in Manchester; 150,000 in Glasgow; and in August 1866 Birmingham saw crowds of between 200,000 and 250,000. These were every bit as large as those that had inspired the Reform Bill of 1832.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, the demonstrations were—as Langley had envisaged in 1858—composed of both working and middle-class reformers. Trade unionists applauded the words of John Bright, and local proprietors allowed their employees to leave work early to attend. In October, on Langley's suggestion, a number of paid lecturers were hired and sent out to the provinces with orders to 'initiate agitation on the platform of the League, create local branches, deliver lectures, get up and take part in public meetings, societies &c' and 10,000 membership cards were ordered to be printed.¹⁰⁷

Langley had also proposed that the opening of Parliament and the inauguration of the new administration be interrupted. This was a government made up of the very people who had rejected even the mild reform of the previous Bill. At a Reform League meeting in November 1866, Langley had suggested a gathering of several thousand supporters at the League headquarters. Each volunteer was to be given a personal petition calling for electoral reform. These, to be printed by the League, would then be taken to Westminster and handed to sympathetic MPs who would then, in turn, present them to Parliament.¹⁰⁸ Although this did not eventuate, it caused sufficient consternation to be decried as an 'infamous conspiracy' and for *The Times* to compare Langley to Feargus O'Connor.¹⁰⁹ The new administration avoided such embarrassment, but the opening of Parliament was still greeted by a reform demonstration 250,000 strong. Langley presided as a marshal, alongside Charles Bradlaugh and Colonel Dickson, on horseback and 'highly decorated with variegated sashes and armlets with silver stars'.¹¹⁰

When Disraeli, perhaps in an attempt to settle the issue of reform, introduced a Bill deliberately designed to restrict the number of workingmen given the franchise, the League and Langley again flouted the authorities by organising a mass meeting in Hyde Park.¹¹¹ Despite prohibitions from Walpole, the presence of an estimated 5,000 police, the swearing in of special constables, and the threat of military intervention (including the use of artillery), a crowd of 150,000 men and woman risked arrest and worse to attend the meeting on 6 May 1867.¹¹² Langley was on one of the ten stages set up for the event and addressed the crowd:

A great cause is intrusted to your keeping, and if you do your duty it will be recorded in English history that when the aristocracy had forgotten their reputed courage, when the House of Commons had learnt to trifle with principles and to laugh at political morality, when the landed interest was frightened out of its propriety, and the middle classes of London were shrieking out for special constables and the police, you, the working classes, by your orderly demeanour, maintained the peace of this city, which a pusillanimous Government had done so much to destroy, and were brave enough to record a dignified protest against the exclusion of your class from political power. (Cheers.)¹¹³

In *The Conservative Party from Peel to Churchill*, Robert Blake described the Reform League's defiance of the second Hyde Park prohibition as the 'crucial event' that led to Disraeli's surrender over Hodgkinson's amendment abolishing compounding eleven days later: a move that added a further 400,000 potential voters to the borough electorate.¹¹⁴ Certainly, as historian Goldwin Smith told League member George Howell:

It is impossible to doubt that the popular movement so effectively and, at the same time, so legally and peacefully conducted by the two combined associations [Reform League and Reform Union] had been the main instrument in turning the present holders of power from the opponents of the limited Reform Bill of last session into the advocates of household suffrage.¹¹⁵

Langley continued as an official of the Reform League until its disestablishment in 1869. The level of commitment this required should not be underestimated. The Executive Committee of the Reform League met twice a week

and, from 11 January 1867, three times a week. In addition, Langley attended numerous branch meetings both as a speaker and Chairman.¹¹⁶ Unlike other members he felt no enmity towards the London Working Men's Association, often considered a rival to the Reform League. When the two organisations held rival London demonstrations Langley ignored internal bickering and attended both.¹¹⁷ With the passing of the 1867 Bill, it was Langley—alone of all the League members—who was invited to sit at the Association's principal table. During the course of his campaigning with the League he had even shared a stage, once more, with Ernest Jones; their personal animosity of less import than dedication to the cause. For much of this work there was no financial recompense, the League taking outgoings so seriously as to take a vote on the purchase of a coalscuttle, with a similar vote taking place the following month as to the purchase of coal.¹¹⁸ Langley had commenced calling for reform in 1853 and continued actively campaigning for some sixteen years. He had simultaneously been active in a number of other movements. The fight against the Sunday legislation was one of these and perhaps what he is best remembered for. It combined many of his passions: education, improvement and egalitarianism.

Notes

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Challenging Sabbatarianism, 1856–1869

Langley's hymn-like poem 'Go on!', published in the *National Sunday League Record* in June 1858, could well stand as a universal radical anthem. Those seeking change are told that the struggle will be long and difficult but they must remain resolute and stay active because God is on their side; the goal is in sight for 'This strife with wrong / Is fated not to last forever / But if we boldly make endeavour / Will ease ere long'. In his campaign against Sabbatarianism, Langley followed his own prescriptive exhortation and was proved correct.

Go on!

Go on! Go on! No moment wait
To help the right;
Be strong in faith, and emulate
The virtues of the good and great,
With all thy might-
Go on!

Go on! Go on! The skies may lower,
The storms may burst;
Unshaken in the trial hour,
Good purposes shall give thee power
To brave the worst-
Go on!

Go on! Go on! Thou canst not tell
Thy mission here;
Whate'er thou doest, labour well,

Nor let a doubt within thee dwell,
 Or coward fear-
 Go on!

Go on! Go on! 'Tis never late
 To act thy part;
 Thy stern resolves shall conquer Fate,
 And springs of happiness create
 Within thy heart! –
 Go on!

Go on! Go on! Thy master's ear,
 And constant eye,
 Observe each groan, each struggling tear;
 HE, 'midst the shadows dark and drear,
 Is standing by –
 Go on!

Go on! Go on! Thy onward way
 Leads up to light;
 The morning now begins to grey,
 Anon the cheering beams of day
 Shall chase the night:
 Go on!

Go on! Go on! Oh doubt it never –
 This strife with wrong
 Is fated not to last forever,
 But if we boldly make endeavour,
 Will ease ere long! –
 Go on!¹

The *National Sunday League Record* was 'Established to promote the opening of the Public Museums, Libraries, and Gardens, in London, and in the towns of England, Ireland, Scotland, for the Instruction, Recreation, and Innocent Amusement of the Working Classes'.² It represented the journalistic arm of the National Sunday League, an organisation in whose successes Langley played a major part. The National Sunday League had been established on 7 September 1855. Although Langley's first recorded participation was not until 23 May

1856, where the *National Sunday League Record* noted that he had attended all the important meetings during the League's formation—so it is likely that he was a member from well before this date.³ Within a year of its formation the National Sunday League had enrolled 1,997 members. Amongst these were men that Langley was to work with closely, including George Jacob Holyoake (1817–1906); Charles Bradlaugh (1833–1891); and Henry J. Slack (1818–1896), President of the Royal Microscope Society and author of the scientific guide *The Marvels of Pond Life*.⁴ By March 1857 Langley was a Vice-President of the League.⁵

The National Sunday League had been formed in response to the continued, and often efficacious, demands of a number of pro-Sabbath pressure groups. The best known was the Society for Promoting the Due Observance of the Lord's Day, more commonly known as the 'Lord's Day Observance Society' (or the 'LDOS'). The LDOS, alongside other groups such as the Society for the Diffusion of Christian Knowledge and the Religious Tract Society, viewed Sunday activities not directly linked to religion as lacking piety, and they fought to retain legal restrictions on the activities of (particularly) working people. In 1851 they had successfully agitated for the closure of the Great Exhibition on Sundays, despite considerable pressure for it to open. During 1854 the LDOS had pushed similarly for restrictions to Sunday drinking hours and the following year an attempt was made to introduce a Sunday Trading Bill. This had resulted in crowds gathering in Hyde Park, ironically commanding wealthy promenaders to 'go to church!', until violently dispersed by police.⁶

As a Unitarian, Langley did not recognise the Sabbath, nor did he accept that any part of scripture fastened a day of rest upon a Sunday. He stood, as he stated on 2 November 1857, for 'the right of private judgement':

We seek to interfere with no man's religious convictions, but to elevate, refine, and educate the masses; to improve the social condition and morality of the artisans, by giving them ennobling pleasures in the room of the debasing ones to which they are driven by the gloom of Sunday . . . we desire to reconcile the Church and people and to vindicate Christianity from the disfigurings with which fanatics and ignorant zealots obscure its beauty withal.⁷

But there was more to his opposition. As the Hyde Park demonstrators had clearly realised, the effects of such religious proscriptions varied according to social class. The purchase of foodstuffs on a Sunday was a necessity due to the inability of poorer families to preserve, or in many cases even prepare, meals. The enforced closure of costermonger's stalls, as demanded by Sabbatarian

pressure groups, would therefore be far more disadvantageous to the poor than to their wealthier, servant-employing compatriots. Similarly, the closure of galleries, which prevented the attendance of working people, had little impact on a middle-class attendee with more free time, and did nothing to inhibit the owner of a picture from enjoying his own property. The Sabbatarian groups' class loyalties were clearly visible in the pamphlets and speeches that their advocates produced. Although employers were urged to command their workers to mark the Sabbath, the employees themselves 'must not, under a pretence of keeping the Sabbath holy, refuse to do any necessary work; such as making fires or beds'.⁸ Unionisation was denounced and strikes condemned as the cause of ungodliness as those involved were often so impoverished that they were forced to sell their Sunday clothes. The ideal worker was a happy, Sabbath-keeping villager living a simple but virtuous life of toil. Self-improvement and education, which Langley saw as a vital and commendable activity for the working poor and which he had promoted through his work at Mechanic's Institutes and lecturing career, was deprecated unless religious in nature. 'Your political rights,' declared one Sabbatarian publication, 'how trumpery, how mean, how unworthy of consideration are they, when compared to those rights which assert the sanctity of the Lord's Day'.⁹

What was frustrating for Langley was that whilst advocating such reactionary policies the Sabbatarians also deliberately, and quite cynically, manipulated public opinion to suggest that it was the National Sunday League that worked against the interests of working people. The Metropolitan Sunday Rest Association, a rival to the LDOS that specialised in claiming it had working-class support, maintained that 'the simple object which it has in view is the emancipation of the London Tradesman, and others engaged in unnecessary labour on the Lord's Day, from a slavery and degradation of which the majority bitterly complain'.¹⁰ The LDOS also employed the London City Mission to select especially pious labourers whom they could produce at meetings to champion their cause.¹¹ An example of the efficacy of such claims was that on 2 November 1857, Langley was interrupted while speaking at the Crown Tavern, Clerkenwell Green, by a Sabbatarian heckler. Rather than call for enforced religious observance he moved an amendment, 'That it is not expedient to countenance any movement that will cause an extension of Sunday labour amongst the working classes'.¹²

As a result of such misinformation, the first actions by the National Sunday League were defeated. Langley was part of an attempt to establish a branch in Camden that was overwhelmed by local Sabbatarian supporters. Similar scenes occurred at Bath and Bristol where they were voted down by a margin of 'at least thirty to one'.¹³ An 1856 attempt by the League's President, Sir Joshua

Walmsley (1794–1871), to debate whether ‘it would promote the moral and intellectual improvement of the working classes of this Metropolis if the Collections of Natural History and Art in the British Museum and the National Gallery were open to the public inspection after Morning Service on Sundays’, was defeated after rival petitions were circulated. The LDOS had been able to gather 628,294 signatures, whilst the National Sunday League managed only 27,251.¹⁴ The *National Sunday League Record* complained about the efforts of ‘every church and chapel congregation, and of almost every Sunday school in the kingdom to petition against Sir Joshua Walmsley’s motion, and to oppose, in every possible way, the progress of the League’.¹⁵

In 1856 the National Sunday League called a conference to discuss these defeats. In addition to misinformation and the advantage that their opponents enjoyed in terms of religious infrastructure, the delegates complained of ‘forged signatures, paid activists, the signatures of Sunday school children’ and ‘Bribes, threats and misrepresentations by old women of both sexes’. To compound these concerns, when asked whether in their districts the League and its objects were understood not one of the twenty-two delegates answered in the affirmative.¹⁶ It was clear therefore that before the Sunday League could achieve any measure of success it had to expose the true nature of the LDOS and inform the populace of its own objectives. J. Baxter Langley was to take the leading role in this campaign.

One of Langley’s first actions was to travel to Canterbury to speak at a meeting ‘To explain to the good people of Canterbury the objects the National League have in view’.¹⁷ Placards posted around the area advertised the meeting beforehand. Although this encouraged supporters, and more importantly the undecided, to attend, it also gave local Sabbatarians ample time to mount their opposition. The *National Sunday League Record* complained that methods of disrupting the event ‘occupied every Pulpit and figured prominently in every prayer meeting’. On 18 November 1856 Langley, alongside William Loaden, Mr Jones and William Turley, attended Canterbury Music Hall. They were greeted by a hostile crowd and as soon as they began to speak faced frequent interruptions. When it was mentioned that the legislature had rejected Walmsley’s motion, for example, there was a ‘loud and long continued applause; after which three cheers were given for the legislature’.¹⁸ When Langley’s companion William Loaden pointed out that nowhere in the Bible was it written that Sunday was a day of rest there were cries of ‘Blasphemy!’ and calls for the speakers to be turned out, while ‘several dissenting ministers started to their feet and vehemently protested by signs for any speaking was rendered inaudible by the noise’.¹⁹ Although such interjections were frequent,

they were predictable. More difficult to counter was a speech by a Mr Bryant, one of the attendees and 'a working man of London'.²⁰ Denying that the religious stipulations made Sunday less valued, he warned that that if they were to 'let the divine authority for the observance of Sunday be once removed . . . far from being a day of relaxation or amusement, Sunday would only become one of labour; the encroachment would be gradual, but it would be certain, and when too late they would see the trap that had been laid for them, and lament that they had fallen into it'.²¹

Langley, perhaps realising that the day was lost, was conciliatory during his own speech. He 'admitted the sincerity by which the motion was opposed by the Sabbatarians'.²² He also made an offer that he was 'ready to argue the subject from a scriptural or any other point of view, wherever and whenever anyone was willing to meet him'.²³ In the ensuing vote, the League was defeated by three to one and the meeting ended with three cheers for the Sabbath and three groans for the visitors. Despite this—and the Christian *British Banner* gloatingly declaring that the League 'would never show their faces *there* again'—a Canterbury branch was soon afterwards established.²⁴ In fact, Langley was invited back to Canterbury within weeks. The controversial Congregationalist speaker the Reverend Brewin Grant was delivering the third in a series of sermons in opposition to the Sunday League. Grant was acknowledged to be a formidable speaker, was described by his supporters as 'the ablest controversialist of the day' and said by his opponents to have a manner that was 'offensive, and his matter frequently flippant, impertinent, and utterly beneath the dignity of the occasion'.²⁵ As Langley was offered time to speak 'after the close of Mr. Brewin Grant's Lecture', no direct debate appears to have occurred. It is to Langley's credit that at the close of the meeting it was Langley and the Sunday League, not Grant, who received three cheers.²⁶

Langley had shared a platform with one of the Sabbatarians' most able speakers, but not in direct debate where he could fully refute their claims. However, this opportunity was soon to arise. The League held their meetings at the Crown Tavern, Clerkenwell, barely three minutes' walk from St James' Church, home of the prolific pamphleteer and anti-Catholic activist, the Reverend Robert Maguire (1826–1890). On 2 November 1857, it was announced that Maguire was preparing a sermon on the evils of the Sunday League and a motion was passed for Langley to prepare a response. To facilitate this a reporter was sent to record verbatim Maguire's sermon. On 16 November, Langley spent nearly three hours repudiating Maguire point by point. The Crown was said to be so full that 'hundreds failed in getting into the meeting at all'.²⁷

Shortly afterwards he received a letter from Maguire:

39, Myddelton-Square, Nov. 25, 1857

I hereby offer to meet Mr. J. Baxter Langley, vice-president and representative of the Sunday League, in open and fair discussion on the Sabbath question in Exeter-hall, on two evenings to be hereafter appointed, and I beg to submit on my part the following rules and regulations for the approval of Mr. Langley and the Sunday League: -

1. That the discussion take place on two evenings in Exeter-hall.
2. That the subject of the former evening be 'the Sabbath question in its theological aspect' and on the latter evening 'the Sabbath question in its physical and social aspects'.
3. That each speaker nominate respectively three gentlemen to act in concert in the arrangements.
4. That each speaker appoint his own chairman.
5. That each speaker occupy three-quarters of an hour at each address; two speeches each per night.
6. That admission to be by ticket, at a price to pay expenses.
7. That the surplus receipts be paid, according to arrangements of the two chairmen and the joint committee, to metropolitan charities.
8. That the proceedings of each evening of discussion be opened by the Lord's Prayer.

<Signed> ROBERT MAGUIRE.²⁸

Robert Maguire was a popular and experienced speaker. Given that the debate was to revolve on the question of scripture, he had every right to feel confident. Indeed, when the question of printing a report of the forthcoming debate was raised, he boasted that though only 5,000 would be initially ordered amongst Sabbatarians, '20,000 or 50,000 would sell'.²⁹ But Langley's opponents remained unaware about the extent of his religious upbringing: raised in a strictly religious, Church of England family, both his father and uncle were clergymen. Langley himself had been educated and brought up as one 'intended for the church'.³⁰ With this background a debate focusing entirely upon scripture was perfectly within his sphere of expertise. Langley also had the advantage of owning a verbatim account of Maguire's sermon. This enabled him to counter Maguire's points before they had even been raised. Through newspaper reports

and the later printed *Sabbatism: A Heresy of the Modern Christian Church; Inconsistent with the Genius of Christianity—Opposed to the Teachings of Jesus Christ—Unwarranted by the Apostles—Condemned by St Paul—and Not to be Found in the Writings of the Early Fathers or the Customs of the Primitive Church; Being a Reply to a Sermon Preached by the Rev. Robert Maguire*, it is possible to ascertain the arguments that Langley employed. Indeed, the work is said to have encapsulated his reasoning throughout his defence of the League and its campaigns.

Although two meetings were initially planned, the men were to meet only once: the first half of the debate focusing upon theology, the second discussing more practical aspects of Sabbath-keeping.³¹ Langley was the first to take to the podium in the evangelical stronghold of Exeter Hall. Pre-empting accusations of ungodliness, Langley chose the noted theologian Reverend Baden Powell as his second. The issue immediately addressed was the nature of the Sabbath itself. Maguire had claimed that Genesis 2:2 contained a *command* to observe the Sabbath. This was allegedly proved by the passage:

And on the seventh day GOD ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And GOD blessed the seventh day and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which GOD created and made.

Langley refuted this argument by pointing out that *Kadosh*, the word for ‘set apart’, was also used to describe men ‘set apart’ for battle. Therefore, the verse was not a command but a historical statement. In any case, Adam, who had lived when ‘the curse of labour had not yet been inflicted’ could hardly have been commanded to rest from his labour. That God’s ‘day of rest’ could be compared to that of mankind was also rejected by Langley. If it was accepted that a day represented a rotation around the sun, then how could the Bible employ the word ‘day’ before God had created the Sun? If it did not refer to a span of twenty-four hours then the period of rest could therefore be ‘a day, a season, a year, a thousand years, or a cycle of myriads of ages’.³²

Langley also challenged Maguire’s assumption that the day was intended for Christian worship. He pointed out that there was no injunction within the New Testament to preserve Sunday as a day of rest and where demands were made within the Old Testament they were linked specifically to the Israelites. Deuteronomy 12–15—Keep the Sabbath day to sanctify it, as the Lord thy GOD has commanded thee—often cited by Sabbatarians as proof of God’s wishes, also contained the line ‘And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt’.³³ Such a line, Langley insisted, could not be intended for those

who had never known such captivity. Even if Sabbath-keeping was applicable to the Christian faith, Langley pointed out, Judaic worship did not forbid entertainment. He cited the verse “Go your way” says the prophet, “eat the fat and drink the sweet . . . for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry”.³⁴ Langley compared this verse with the actions of some of the more extreme Sabbatarians who commanded their children not to play or in some cases even to laugh on a Sunday.³⁵

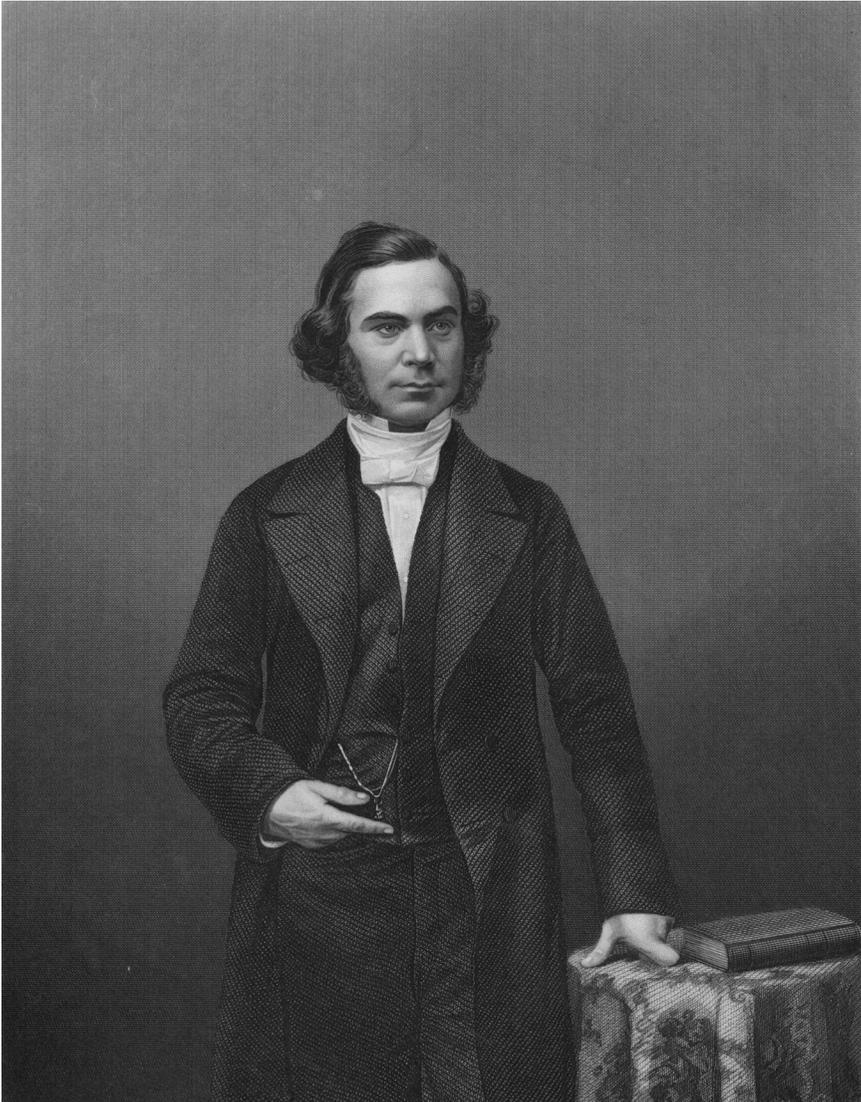


Figure 7: Reverend Robert Maguire, MA (NYPL Digital Library/Digital I.D.1658937).



Figure 8: J. Baxter Langley, 1858 (London School of Economics, Langley/3ams/g/04/132).

Before Maguire could respond that Langley was misusing scripture for his own purposes, he cited church luminaries who shared his views. These included St Athanasius—‘We keep no Sabbaths as the ancients did, except an eternal Sabbath that shall have no end’—Eusebius—‘They cared not for corporal circumcision, no more do we; nor for the observation of Sabbaths, no more do we’—Martin Luther—‘As regards the Sabbath or Sunday, there is no necessity for keeping it’—Calvin—‘The Sabbath is contained not in one day, but in the whole course of our life . . .’—and St Paul—‘Let no man therefore judge you in meat or in drink, or in respect to a holy day or the new moon or of the Sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the body is of Christ’.³⁶

When Maguire was called to speak it was apparent that he had little to refute his opponent. He reprimanded Langley for ‘having wandered astray into a dissertation on the Sabbath, as observed according to the Judaical [*sic*] and Christian dispensations’.³⁷ He then pointed out that every time Jesus had seemed to break the Sabbath it had been due to his ‘doing a good deed’ (Langley had given examples of Jesus himself working on the Sabbath, teaching his disciples, healing the sick and even meeting with the Chief Pharisee). Maguire concluded, having been told that his time was up, by asking ‘what testimony, supported by scripture, he [Langley] could bring forward for authorising a half Sunday for exhibitions and the opening of museums, libraries and gardens?’³⁸

After a short break, the second period of debate began. Langley ‘amid applause and laughter’ asserted his belief that ‘after what had fallen from the lips of Mr. Maguire he was convinced of victory’.³⁹ He compared the work of the League to that of pulling an ass or an ox from a pit. This action (taken from Luke 17: 6–7) Maguire admitted was permissible even on the Sabbath:

Was it not therefore right to pull out on a Sunday some poor wretch who lived in a dark alley, and invite him forth into the country? That was equivalent to saving life, and he hoped that the day would come when in this great Babylon, and our large manufacturing towns, thousands and tens of thousands of the working classes would shower blessings, on the Sabbath as the day when they could enlarge their understandings, elevate their physical condition [loud cheers].⁴⁰

The fact that Maguire began his response by stating that ‘he did not fear any lack of answer to the questions that had been put to him’, suggested the opposite.⁴¹ To counter Langley’s many quotations, he fielded only one. Paley’s *Moral Philosophy*, he suggested, indicated that the early followers of Christ had

transferred the Sabbath to Sunday. There followed a series of peevish, almost petulant, questions. Maguire wished to know 'how by going to public gardens on a Sunday, the British working people, the most enlightened in the world, could be instructed?' Of Langley, who he knew had worked as a Sunday School teacher at John Relly Beard's Unitarian Bridge Street School, he asked 'what sort of Sunday school he would have if he allowed his little boys to run after public gardens on the Sabbath?' Finally, he demanded to know, 'Had the Sunday League undertaken a part in the philanthropical task of improving the working classes? Would they improve their health by taking them on a Sunday to public gardens?'⁴²

It was clear that the debate had been a triumph both for Langley and the League. The Sunday League quickly distributed an unauthorised copy of the debate. This infuriated their LDOS opponents. An irate Maguire wrote to the League and threatened that 'England shall hear of this!'⁴³ Langley's victory is shown in the fact that, from May 1858 onwards, the *National Sunday League Record* offered 'A photographic portrait of J. Baxter Langley, Esq. (6 inches by 4 ½) price 3s. 6d. or in handsome composition frame 5s'.⁴⁴ On 18 January 1858, a public *soiree* was held in Langley's honour where a 'large number of ladies and gentleman were in attendance'.⁴⁵ Handsomely framed testimonials were presented, alongside speeches interspersed by vocal and instrumental music. Langley especially thanked his friends Slack and Loaden, and 'the evening altogether seemed to be enjoyed by the company'.

Other debates were to follow, with Langley involved in many of them. In November 1858, he commenced a tour of Scotland where he debated with Scottish clergyman Robert Court. Over three nights, and despite ill health, it was 'acknowledged even by the Sabbatarians to be a complete triumph for Mr. Langley'.⁴⁶ Conversely, the tone employed by the Sabbatarians deteriorated as the claims of the Lord's Day Observance Society grew less convincing. During one of Langley's Scottish lectures, members of the Protestant Layman's Association sought to storm the platform: fighting ensued and a dozen policemen rushed from different parts of the hall to separate the combatants.⁴⁷ Langley himself was the target of libellous and unfounded accusations. The *Scottish Banner* complained that 'The League, no doubt at tremendous expense, has engaged Mr Langley to travel the country', and similar 'sneering insinuations' were made against him at meetings.⁴⁸ In fact, the opposite was true. Not only was Langley unpaid he 'actually defrayed his own personal expenses and undertook these arduous duties at great personal inconvenience'.⁴⁹ The *Christian Cabinet* and the *Record* both fraudulently reported that Langley, as a result of his 'defeat' during the Glasgow debate with Court,

had resigned from the Sunday League.⁵⁰ Both Langley and the League immediately published denials.

With the newfound confidence that Langley had imparted, the League was able to take the battle for credibility to the Sabbatarians. The inaugural meeting of the Protestant Layman's Association was held on 26 April 1858 at St Martin's Hall, Longacre. Placards promised to 'expose the ulterior designs of the Sabbath Desecration League, and its tactics at public meetings, and to reply to the sophistries and mis-informations [*sic*] of its agents'.⁵¹ At the close of the meeting a resolution was moved:

That the non-observance of the Lord's Day as a day of rest and devotional exercises by persons who employ it for the purposes of trading and amusement is highly detrimental to the religious, and, therefore, to the moral and social interests of the people; that this meeting considers it the duty of all Christians and patriots to discountenance the desecration of that day and to use their influence to cause it to be observed with due reverence and honour.⁵²

This was immediately opposed by Langley who was in attendance with a large number of League supporters. He proposed the amendment:

That this meeting, having heard the statements of the National Protestant Society, expresses a strong opinion that the charges made by them are groundless and frivolous, and cordially approves the steps taken by the National Sunday League in seeking to obtain rational recreation for the masses on Sunday afternoons.⁵³

The amendment was then carried by an overwhelming majority.⁵⁴

Although Langley had represented the National Sunday League with success, he knew that all his proselytising was of little use if the existing Sunday legislation were to remain otherwise unchallenged. It was clear to Langley that new strategies must be adopted. On Sunday 8 August 1858, he arranged a tour of the Gardens at Kew.⁵⁵ Attendees arrived at 4pm having boarded a prearranged train. After a walk around the grounds a lecture was given by Langley on botanical classifications illustrated by specimens of leaves and the like (Langley, it must be remembered, had won the silver medal for Botany at Leeds School of Medicine).⁵⁶ This was only the first in what was to become a regular event at Kew, with Langley also organising excursions to Hastings, and Box Hill.⁵⁷ Such outings, designed to challenge Sabbatarian stipulations, could also claim to be

an appreciation of the natural beauties that they claimed God had created. This made it difficult for the LDOS to challenge Langley without appearing petty and churlish. He played upon this and his descriptions of the outings were almost Biblical in tone:

Bright vermilion pelargoniums in masses looked like fire upon the ground, when contrasted with the pale verbenas growing near; the glorious green of the grass below, and the blue sky, completed the beautiful scene, which gave new beauties, fresh odours, and changing music of a thousand birds, as the blood red sun went down in the west, behind the mighty elms.⁵⁸

Another strategy was to mount a fresh challenge to the enforced closure of the Crystal Palace. The Sunday embargo of the Great Exhibition had been one of the LDOS's best organised and most successful campaigns. It had also illustrated clearly the Sabbatarians' dismissive attitude towards working people. Charles John Vaughn (1816–1897), then Headmaster of Harrow, wrote in the pamphlet *A Few Words on the Crystal Palace Question*, that 'no gallery of painting or sculpture will have any abiding attractions for the class thus described. The suggestion that such a class might be educated was equally rejected, with Vaughn declaring:

tastes so brutish shall not be transformed by any such expedient. They will remain what they are, until a mightier engine shall bear upon them; no display of art will allure them to civilisation.⁵⁹

In his work *George Williams and the Young Men's Christian Association: A Study in Victorian Social Values*, Clyde Binfield attributed such attitudes to a fundamental belief amongst Sabbatarians that the Great Exhibition was, by its very nature, ungodly. Undoubtedly awe inspiring, even the exponent of 'muscular Christianity' Charles Kingsley (1819–1875) declared he had been moved to tears when he first visited the Crystal Palace in 1851.⁶⁰ But it was also a celebration of scientific not divine achievements. As such, some felt that it was a secular usurpation of feelings rightfully belonging only to God.⁶¹

In 1852 the Palace was moved to Sydenham and became a business venture. This meant its Sunday closure could again be contested. But Sabbatarian campaigners, backed by *The Times*, immediately commenced an operation to extend the prohibition. Captain Henry Young, a vocal shareholder in the Crystal Palace Company, also agitated for continued Sabbath recognition. As a

result, a clause was inserted in the Company's charter of incorporation. This stipulated that no person should be admitted into the building or grounds on Sunday for a money payment, made directly or indirectly, without the sanction of Parliament.⁶² Although a victory for the Sabbatarians, this stipulation left room for Langley and his associates to mount a challenge. If it were illegal for a monetary payment to be taken this meant that if no financial transaction occurred, then entry remained legitimate.

While remaining a high-profile venture, the Crystal Palace Company had not lived up to its pecuniary promise. In order to make the Palace more attractive to investors, the directors of the Crystal Palace Company convened a shareholders' meeting for 17 December. Here they proposed allowing current shareholders to exchange their stock for admission to the Palace and grounds. By doing so they could regain ownership of stock, making the Palace more viable financially. To avoid this scheme having an adverse effect upon weekday sales, they proposed admission be limited to Sundays. This they could do as no actual money was being exchanged. On 17 December 1857, the meeting was held and—despite objections from Captain Henry Young and a small number of other Sabbatarian shareholders that the scheme was 'contrary to the laws of God and the Charter'—the proposal was passed virtually unanimously.⁶³ But shortly thereafter, another Sabbatarian shareholder—the barrister John Rendall—took the matter to court. Rendall argued that as the shares had a monetary value, the exchange for admission was an illegal financial transaction. Vice Chancellor Sir W.P. Wood concurred thereby putting an end to the proposal.⁶⁴

Again, this represented a victory for the LDOS but left room for the League and its supporters to manoeuvre. On 30 June 1858, Langley and H.J. Slack attended the sixth ordinary meeting of company shareholders.⁶⁵ Both men had recently purchased stock in the company, and this allowed them to both speak at the meeting and to vote on any proposals made. The company Chairman, Thomas N. Farquhar, was not the bearer of glad tidings. Sales of shilling tickets had fallen; season tickets had been comparatively unsuccessful; company share values had fallen and the company's £65,000 lease of Dulwich Woods was now due. He recommended therefore that no dividends be given. Farquhar ended his introductory speech by stating that 'their great object must be to make the Palace a good paying commercial concern'.⁶⁶ Slack was first to respond. He proposed a motion of support for Farquhar but added that

this meeting believes that the present depreciation of Crystal Palace shares arises solely from the non-development of its resources and that the enterprise will become remunerative, and regain public

confidence, when its multifarious capacities for amusement, education, art, commerce and social progress, are adequately employed.

William Addiscott, another supporter of Sunday opening, then rose and proposed that rather than Sunday entrance being limited to those wishing to exchange their stock, it should be extended to every shareholder. Furthermore, for every ten shares owned an additional ticket 'to admit a friend' should be allocated. By not involving the exchange of stock for entrance, and simply allowing entrance to shareholders, the proposal effectively negated the *Rendall v The Crystal Palace Company* verdict. This was clearly an organised attempt by the League to wrest control of the Palace from Sabbatarian shareholders: how organised was shown soon afterwards when the motion was opposed by Captain Henry Young.⁶⁷ The ensuing debate, reported in the *Daily News* verbatim, illustrates not only how well Langley and his compatriots had set their trap, but the sheer enjoyment that was taken at their opponents' expense:

Capt. Young, amidst much interruption, protests against the motion. He would not attempt to argue the question on moral or religious grounds but he hoped that there were even some who were willing to recognise the existence of the Sabbath as a divine ordinance. From the moment the company became associated with the anti-Sabbatarian movement he prophesied its failure . . . The meeting were [*sic*] perhaps not so well acquainted as he was, with that great body, who had sent up petitions for the observance of the Lord's Day, signed by over a million persons.⁶⁸

A Proprietor—Some of them were forgeries. (Cheers.)

Capt. Young—That may be Sir, but, I do not hesitate to say, that there are tens of thousands of persons who, although the Crystal Palace may at the moment be closed on the Sabbath—

Mr Langley—Why, we go there on the Sabbath. (Hear hear, and laughter.)

Capt. Young—Please to behave yourself. (Laughter) I say, that although the public do not enter the Palace on the Sabbath—

Mr Langley—But we do enter it on the Sabbath. (Laughter.)

Capt. Young—Mr Chairman, will you call this gentleman to order? (Loud laughter.) I say, that there are thousands who, although the Palace is not open on the Sabbath—

Mr Langley—But it is open on the Sabbath. (Renewed laughter.)

Capt. Young, amidst great interruption, at length succeeded in saying that there were tens of thousands of persons who never went to the Palace, and who deliberately use their influence to prevent others from going thither, because they associated it with the movement for opening places of entertainment on Sunday, and because therefore, they considered it degraded. (Uproar.) He had been talking that morning with a gentleman, who told him that, though he went to the great exhibition fourteen times, he had not yet been to the Crystal Palace and for this very reason. (Cries of 'What a fool!', 'Colney Hatch!' and miscellaneous noises.)⁶⁹

Captain Young was soon so drowned out by the uproar that he requested of the chairman five minutes in which to speak. He was granted three and a half,

and fifty watches were immediately pulled out to mark the time. The gallant gentleman honourably observed the condition and resumed his seat almost immediately afterwards.⁷⁰

A ballot was demanded, and although there was difficulty finding the required number of seconders, it was passed. On 21 July at the next shareholders meeting the results were announced: 43,480 in favour of Sunday opening with 19,405 opposed.⁷¹

The decision, Langley was aware, opened the door for more than shareholders to enter the Palace. One investor soon afterwards offered to transfer 100 Crystal Palace shares to members of the Sunday League at market value (one per person), and it is not hard to see how this could be extended.⁷² The Sabbatarians were also aware that their control of the Palace was in peril and responded quickly. A complete list of the shareholders was obtained by the LDOS and a remonstrance against Sunday opening, signed by 441 clergymen of the established church—including the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishops of London and Winchester, and by 213 non-conformist ministers—was sent to each one. This stated:

The Crystal Palace itself, and its grounds, have since been actually opened on the Lord's Day,—[we] beg to represent to the shareholders in the Crystal Palace Company that such opening is, in our opinion, highly undesirable in a moral and religious point of view; and we trust that the shareholders may be induced to reconsider and rescind the late resolution.⁷³

Accompanying the remonstrance was a questionnaire. This asked how many shares were owned, whether the addressee had voted at the ballot and, if so, whether in favour or in opposition. Finally, it enquired, if another meeting was called, whether they would vote in favour of the opening being rescinded. A record was kept of the replies and copies forwarded to clergymen and other men of influence known to be favourable to the LDOS, with a request that they use every effort to secure votes for rescinding the resolution.⁷⁴ The *Christian Record* summed up the feeling and described the opening as a 'vile pestilence'.⁷⁵

The LDOS campaign was effective and at the next shareholders' meeting many new faces were seen. Langley was again involved in fierce argument with Young and other Sabbatarians. One of these, George Kerry, proposed that the Sunday opening resolution be annulled and a show of hands was taken. Although it was defeated by 105 votes to eighty-one this was far closer than the previous meeting. Again, Sabbatarians demanded a ballot and this time there was no lack of seconders.⁷⁶ On 19 January 1859, at a meeting of the shareholders at the Bridge Street Hotel in Southwark, the results were announced. Once again it was far closer than at the original meeting:

For rescinding the resolution

Personal votes	6,738
Proxies	69,026
Total	75,026

Against rescinding the resolution:

Personal votes	16,268
Proxies	76,026
Total	92,785 ⁷⁷

The Chairman, Mr Farquhar, consequently declared the opening of the Palace and grounds to shareholders on Sunday afternoons would be continued.

The announcement was received with loud cheers.⁷⁸ It was a great victory for Langley and a watershed for the movement. Manipulation of the decision soon ensured that Sunday visits were too popular for the Sabbatarians to stop them. Shares in the company, with Sunday tickets, were advertised in the *Free Sunday Advocate*.⁷⁹ By 1865, ‘Share Clubs’ were in existence. For a small subscription members could hire a share and bring their spouse and children to the Palace free of charge.⁸⁰ In September 1865, 8,000 free tickets were distributed and ‘nearly 10,000 of the artisans of the Metropolis, their wives and families (children being admitted without tickets) visited the Palace and grounds on a Sunday afternoon’. There they heard Langley speak on the benefits to be gained by the Sunday opening not only of Crystal Palace but of museums and galleries also.

Although Langley had played an integral role in the League’s success—and continued to serve in a leading capacity—characteristically, this was not his only political activity of the period. Concurrently he had purchased and edited the Chartist newspapers the *People’s Paper* and the *London News*. These had drained both his financial resources and his vitality. As a result, he had taken employment with Joseph Cowen as editor of the *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*. This position required his relocation far from the metropolitan hub of anti-Sabbatarian activity. In January 1859, the *National Sunday League Record* published the following correspondence from Langley, adding that it was ‘With pain we lay the following letter before readers’:

DEAR FRIENDS AND FELLOW-WORKERS,—the circumstances arising out of my connection with the *London News*, and my having an appointment out of London offered to me, leave me this as the only means of bidding adieu for a time to those who have co-operated with me in Sunday League agitation at head-quarters. No one can know except myself the pain which the separation has cost me. While each step in the path of duty found new flowers of friendship springing in my way, my course was indeed happy; and few men have been so fortunate as I have been in the estimable and dear companionships which have been mine in that part of public life which finds its appropriate record in these pages . . . I could fill many lines with names which are known in the movement for ever graven on my heart. To them—to all my fellow labourers—I bid a sad adieu, with a hope that the separation may be more brief than my judgement tells me it must be.⁸¹

Langley's hiatus from the National Sunday League was indeed extended. Busying himself in other projects, he was not reported as speaking at a League meeting again until 1863. This speech was in support of thirty-five rural labourers prosecuted under the Lord's Day Act for harvesting on a Sunday.⁸² The National Sunday League had adopted a policy of supporting those prosecuted under such Sabbath based legislation.⁸³ The men had 'received no wages . . . but only their meat and drink' for their work but a local clergyman had complained that his congregation had been disturbed by their drunken behaviour. The following week police attended five farms and each of the thirty-five men arrested was fined 5s. Five of those accused had been unable to pay and therefore had property forcibly taken from their homes and sold by the police. Claims as to the men's drunkenness were not mentioned in court and contradictory evidence between locals and police regarding inclement weather and the necessity of the work led to accusations of direct LDOS involvement.⁸⁴ The Sunday League held support meetings and petitioned Parliament calling for the conviction to be overturned.⁸⁵

Although in no doubt that the League represented the majority opinion, Langley told the meeting that 'with the Sunday school machinery in their hands, the Sabbatarians could always outnumber them in the matter of signatures to petitions'.⁸⁶ Furthermore, 'through the exercise of Sabbatarian influence no man in the House of Commons was found who had courage enough to speak in favour of the people'. But if the LDOS could claim popular support (however dishonestly), Langley believed that the League could claim the patronage of the most educated members of society. What the League needed was some form of institutional or organisational manifestation that would demonstrate its secular but serious nature. Langley sought to provide this through his 'Sunday Evenings for the People' and the 'Church of the Future'.

'The religious idea has always been associated with a desire to seek union', Langley stated in the pamphlet *Churches of the Past and the Church of the Future*.⁸⁷ 'It is in the nature of man to seek association, and to use it to accomplish purposes which he believes to be good and wise'. But as he also warned readers, 'it has always been the characteristic of priesthoods that they laid great stress upon the fulfilment of ceremonials . . . instituted with the special intent of providing material support to the hierarchy maintaining its ascendancy over the people'.⁸⁸ Langley envisaged a series of lectures conducted by men of science and the arts of such celebrated status that they would be beyond criticism. This would encourage a sense of community among attendees mirroring the best elements of church attendance. But it would be one free from ceremonials and it would be science, rather than religious dogma, that inspired.

In December 1865, advertisements for the first of these ‘Sunday Evenings for the People’ lectures were posted in prominent newspapers. These declared:

The Sunday, as a day of rest and leisure, when the thoughts of men are released from the engrossing labour of mere existence is the time most fitted for the exercise of reflective faculties; and the Winter Sunday evenings would be so employed, if opportunities were afforded by large numbers of those who at present do not attend places of worship, who would listen to discourses on science and the wonders of the universe thus producing in their minds a reverence and love of the Deity and raising up an opposing principle to intemperance and immorality.⁸⁹

Luminaries such as Charles and Erasmus Darwin, James Martineau (1805–1900), John Stuart Mill, and Professor John Tyndall (1820–1893) publicly supported the evenings. More impressive still were those that Langley had motivated to speak. These represented some of the most influential men of the period. The foremost of these, Professor Thomas Henry Huxley—also known as ‘Darwin’s Bulldog’—spoke at the opening meeting on ‘The Desirability of Improving Natural Knowledge’.⁹⁰ This was to be followed by:

January 14.—Sir J. Bowring LD.D. F.B.S. ‘Religious Progress Outside the Christian Pale—Among Buddhists, Brahmins, Parsees, Mahomadens etc’.⁹¹

January 21.—W.B. Carpenter, Esq., M.D. F.R.S. ‘The Antiquity of Man’.

January 28.—W.B. Hodson, Esq., LD.D. ‘Many Members, One Body’.

February 4.—James Heywood, Esq., F.R.S. ‘The Early History of the World’.

Karl Marx’s daughter Eleanor was present and described the evening:

With respect to religion, a significant movement is currently developing in stuffy old England. The top men in science, Huxley (Darwin’s school) at the head, with Charles Lyell, Bowring, Carpenter, etc.,

give very enlightened, truly bold, free-thinking lectures for the people in St. Martin's Hall, and, what is more, on Sunday evenings, exactly at the time when the lambs are usually making a pilgrimage to the Lord's pastures; the hall has been full to bursting and the people's enthusiasm so great that, on the first Sunday evening, when I went there with my family, more than 2,000 people could not get into the room, which was crammed full.⁹²

Almost immediately, the LDOS moved to close the events. The fourth lecture concluded with an announcement that, due to threatened legal action, the meetings had been forced to close. Robert Baxter, Chairman of the LDOS—employing a piece of legislation framed in 1781—had communicated his intention to have St Martin's Hall declared a 'disorderly house'.⁹³ This could have resulted in punitive fines of £200 on every occasion that the venue was utilised. Langley was, as always, willing to take the matter to court. By the close of the meeting, a defence fund had been established and £250 collected.⁹⁴ But the Sabbatarian prosecution was not aimed at Langley, but at the lessee of the venue. With no political agenda and no reason to fight the case, she had demanded Langley cease the lectures. The lessee's solicitor J. Dangerfield wrote, 'the danger of conviction is so great, that no person can for a moment be advised by any reasonable person to incur that danger'.⁹⁵ It was an astute move by the LDOS Chairman. Whilst shutting down the meetings he had also avoided the risk of them being declared legal in a court of law. The League's solicitor, J. Shaen, waited upon Baxter to request Langley and League's Hon. Secretary, J.M. Morrell, replace the lessee as respondents. They also asked for a referral to the Queen's Bench for adjudication. Baxter initially gave his assent but having effectively ended the 'Sunday Evenings for the People', there was little incentive for him to do so.⁹⁶

Langley had encountered Robert Baxter before. In the 1858 debate Baxter had acted as Robert Maguire's second. He was a dedicated speaker and pamphleteer and his dislike for men such as Langley was palpable in his works. In *Liberalism Revolutionary, Emancipation an Apostasy Leading to Britain's Awful Visitation*, for example, he wrote:

Oh ye liberal Liberals, ye are as faithless as ye are brainless; and because ye are faithless, ye hate to see these characters of admonition and would blot them out: because ye are brainless, ye hate to regard the monuments of your fathers, which mock your comprehension, and would pull them down.⁹⁷

As with the Sabbatarian actions at the Crystal Palace, the closure of Langley's meetings was a victory for the LDOS but one that was capable of being challenged. The 85-year-old legislation that Baxter employed was designed:

for preventing certain abuses and profanations on the Lord's Day, called Sunday, under pretence of enquiring into religious doctrines, and explaining texts of the Holy Scripture . . . by people unlearned and incompetent to explain the same, to the corruption of good morals, and to the great encouragement of irreligion and profaneness.⁹⁸

This effectively meant that if Langley could prove that the conveners were neither unlearned nor unqualified in religious matters, then the threat of prosecution would be removed. He therefore renamed 'Sunday Evenings for the People' the 'Church of the Future', the attendees became a congregation of 'recreational religionists' and in 1868 he registered the lectures as a free unsectarian church under the Dissenters' Toleration Act. 'They were,' he explained at the first meeting on 3 October 1868, 'assembled as a body of persons registered according to law as a religious association or Church. Their church was the Church of Progress and their religion the religion of science, as expressed in the universe.' The philosophy of the organisation was that they 'regarded freedom as the preliminary condition of intellectual and moral health, and they, therefore, demanded from their members no adherence to a fixed creed; they enunciated no articles of faith; they accepted the authority of no book, except that of "the universe", whose wondrous revelations they were established to make more widely known.'⁹⁹

Once again Robert Baxter wrote to the hall's lessees threatening not only to sue for maximum penalties but to oppose legally the renewal of the hall's licence at the Middlesex Magistrates Court the following October. Langley also received a letter warning him that he would be sued unless the services were immediately suspended.¹⁰⁰ Unlike Baxter's previous threat, circumstances this time favoured Langley. If the matter went to court and the League lost, a new strategy would need to be adopted. If they were to win, however, it would be a major defeat for the LDOS and would open the door for Sunday education across the country. On 7 March 1867, and 14 January 1868, at Bow Street Police-court the two parties and Magistrate Sir Thomas Henry met to discuss the case. Copies of all lectures, discourses, programmes and advertisements were requested and provided by Langley. Henry suggested that the 'lady who at the time of the original proceedings was lessee of the hall should not be harassed by a criminal conviction . . . that the lady's name should be

withdrawn, and that of the president of the recreative religionists Mr. J. Baxter Langley . . . be substituted'.¹⁰¹ This was the very action that Langley himself had requested. The LDOS case maintained that 'the entertainments were not really services, and the body was not really a religious body, but an anti-religious body seeking to destroy the Christian Sabbath and all religious observances'. The definition of 'entertainment' was therefore paramount, with Sir Thomas warning that even if the meeting were religious in nature, if it also provided amusement it would be guilty of breaching the act.¹⁰² A final discussion revolved around the meaning of the term 'debating'. The LDOS argued that a lecture represented a form of debate, and thus contravened the specific stipulations of the legislation. Langley's solicitors maintained that this was not the case. On this point, Henry backed Langley, declaring that debate could not occur 'when only one person spoke'.¹⁰³

The case was heard on 19 November 1868, before Mr Justice Byles and Mr Justice Willes of the Court of Common Pleas. Baxter's lawyers cited the Sunday Act legislation and claimed that it had been transgressed in several aspects. Langley, who was defending himself, countered by claiming that the meetings fell under 'an Act for the exempting their Majesties' Protestant Subjects, dissenting from the Church of England, from the penalties of certain laws'.¹⁰⁴ The primary points of argument were whether the meetings were indeed irreligious in nature; whether the lectures could be classed as 'entertainment'; whether the house was 'disorderly'; and whether those admitted made payments to do so. If any of these were found to be the case, Langley would be found guilty and fined appropriately.

Regarding the charge of keeping a disorderly house, Langley had made sure there was little for the prosecution to exploit. Another section of the Sunday Act defined the actions that constituted a disorderly house. This was 'public dancing, music, or other public entertainment of the like kind'.¹⁰⁵ At Langley's meetings a strict decorum had been maintained. Although music was played, it was religious in nature, there was no singing, no dancing, and even applause was forbidden. In summing up, Byles stated that 'there was no Public Prayer or Address to the Deity, other than was contained in the musical composition. There was no debating or discussion, nothing dramatic or comic, or tending to the corruption of morals, or to the encouragement of irreligion or profanity'. Although the evenings undoubtedly had a financial element, Langley had again been careful. One third of the seats were free of charge. For the other patrons there was no cost for admission, but merely a 'fee' for the use of a reserved seat (this might be 3d, 6d, 1s or 2s 6d). In summing up, Byles again found in Langley's favour: 'The object of the promoters of the Association was not

pecuniary gain—on the contrary, the services were carried out at a pecuniary loss to themselves, although attended by considerable numbers of the public'. As to the definition of 'religious' or 'irreligious' that was not something the court felt qualified to answer. These were 'inquiries into which we, it is plain, cannot enter'.

The major flaw in Baxter's case, however, was in the antiquity of the statute he employed. The Sunday Act 21, George III, Chap. 49 dated from 1781 and had been intended for very different circumstances than existed in London in 1868. For Baxter the 'Church of the Future' was an abomination to the one true faith to which he was so avidly devoted. To the magistrates, however, this was only one of many faiths to be respected. 'The worship of Jews', Byles summed up 'who deny the Christian Revelation entirely, and of Mahomedans who supersede it (some millions of whom are now our fellow subjects) would not be within the Statute if any of their festivals happened to fall on the Lord's Day, and persons were admitted partly gratuitously, and partly by Tickets, as in the case under consideration.' The judgment of the court was therefore for the defendant.¹⁰⁶

The case was more than a victory for Langley personally; it set a precedent that was never to be overturned. Ten years later in *The Liberty of the Press, Speech, and Public Worship, Being Commentaries on the Liberties of the Subject and the Laws of England*, the important legal scholar James Paterson cited the case; as did *A Selection of Leading Cases in the Common Law* in 1908; and *The Clergyman's Handbook of Law* in 1909.¹⁰⁷ Sir Peter Benson Maxwell cited the case in the 1920 *On the Interpretation of Statutes*; and as late as September 1984 it was relevant to a case being heard before the High Court of Calcutta. Quite remarkably, in 2007, Ian Ellis-Jones, Solicitor of the Supreme Court of New South Wales and the High Court of Sydney, cited the case in his work *Beyond the Scientologists: Towards a Better Definition of what Constitutes a Religion for Legal Purposes in Australia Having Regard to Salient Judicial Authorities From the United States of America As Well as Important Non-Judicial Authorities*.¹⁰⁸ With such a precedent in place, the Sabbatarians were never to wield such authority over the actions of working people again.

But for Langley, the victory came at a cost. He had joined the movement to combat the power of conservative Christian ideology. To overturn this, he had enlisted the aid of some of the most revered scientists and writers of his era. Foremost of these had been the outstanding scientist Professor T.H. Huxley. Huxley, a friend and advocate of Charles Darwin, was of course famous for an 1860 debate in which he accused the Bishop of Oxford of being 'a man who used his great gifts to obscure the truth' in regard to evolution. For Huxley,

and men of his ilk, 'Sunday Evenings for the People' had been an opportunity to openly challenge Christian dogma, not to support it, in however diluted a form. Huxley and his associates viewed Langley's transformation of the lectures from a secular to a religious context with contempt. 'When the Sunday Lecture Society was at work, they got notice that public lectures, not religious, were contrary to law,' wrote Dr Walter White, Assistant Secretary to the Royal Society, 'Langley thereupon, without consulting any one, went and registered it as Religious Recreation Society. Huxley withdrew in disgust; one of the objects of the Society had been to fight the law, and that was set aside by the foolish registration.'¹⁰⁹ Huxley himself publicly criticised Langley's organisation. He had delivered his lecture 'before they were ill-advised enough to shelter themselves behind that ludicrous name which they selected for their new sham sect of "recreative religionists"'.¹¹⁰

In 1869, National Sunday League activist W.H. Domville—who had assisted Langley—broke away and founded the similar, but entirely secular, Sunday Lecture Society. The goals of the new society, he stated at the opening meeting, were that 'in teaching the fact of science, in other words in teaching the best knowledge which we may possess in all subjects, we . . . shall assist in converting the masses into reasoning and reasonable beings, and shall thus get rid of some of the misery and wrong which we see around us'. The Society soon attracted 200 of London's leading intellectuals and T.H. Huxley chaired the first meeting.¹¹¹ Even the National Sunday League distanced itself from Langley and placed its support behind Domville. Although it wished him success, it was critical of the religious tone of his meetings: 'Co-operation for the *Church [of the Future]*', it stated, 'is neither asked or given'.¹¹² Langley's insistence that there be no applause during performances 'is too much of a Sabbatism for us'.¹¹³

What his critics ignored were Langley's astute political actions over a decade of campaigning and the fact that the final defeat of Sabbatarianism was the result of his pragmatic use of the legislative protection offered to dissenters through his 'Church of the Future' and 'Recreational Religionists'. He was a living validation of the last stanza of his poem:

Go on! Go on! Oh doubt it never –
 This strife with wrong
 Is fated not to last forever,
 But if we boldly make endeavour,
 Will ease ere long! –
 Go on!

Notes

- 1 J. Baxter Langley, 'Go on!', *National Sunday League Record*, June 1858.
- 2 'Header', *National Sunday League Record*, December 1858, p. 329.
- 3 *National Sunday League Record*, December 1856, p. 12.
- 4 John Wigley, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Sunday* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980) p. 103.
- 5 *National Sunday League Record*, June 1856.
- 6 Wigley, *Victorian Sunday*, pp. 68–69. The intensity of feeling inspired by such legislation is explored in more detail in Brian Harrison, 'The Sunday Trading Riots of 1855', *The Historical Journal*, VIII, 1965, pp. 219–45.
- 7 J. Baxter Langley, *Sabbatism: A Heresy of the Modern Christian Church; Inconsistent with the Genius of Christianity—Opposed to the Teachings of Jesus Christ—Unwarranted by the Apostles—Condemned by St Paul—and Not to be Found in the Writings of the Early Fathers or the Customs of the Primitive Church; Being a Reply to a Sermon Preached by the Rev. Robert Maquire* (London: National Sunday League Office, 1857) p. 24.
- 8 Anon, 'A Sunday Evening's Present to a Female Servant', *Houlston's Tracts*, no. 3, in Wigley, *Victorian Sunday*, p. 67.
- 9 *Ibid.*, pp. 65–67.
- 10 *An Address to the Inhabitants of the Metropolis by the Committee of the Metropolitan Sunday Rest Association (To the Higher Classes of Society, on the Duty of Discouraging Sunday Trading. To the Employers of the Metropolis on the Early Payment of Wages. To the Tradesmen on the Duty and Advantage of Keeping Their Shops Closed on Sunday, To the Purchasers an Appeal, etc.)* (London: Metropolitan Sunday Rest Association, 1859) p. 6.
- 11 Wigley, *Victorian Sunday*, p. 106.
- 12 'The National Sunday League', *Standard*, 3 November 1857.
- 13 'Signal Defeat of the National Sunday League at Bath', *Essex Standard, and General Advertiser for the Eastern Counties*, 24 December 1856.
- 14 'One Year On', *National Sunday League Record*, October 1856, p. 42.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 41.
- 16 Delegate from Newbury, 'A Tabulated Statement', *National Sunday League Record*, October 1856, pp. 9–10.
- 17 'The National Sunday League in Canterbury', *Daily News*, 24 November 1856.
- 18 *Ibid.*
- 19 *Ibid.*
- 20 Mr Bryant, 'The National Sunday League in Canterbury', *Daily News*, 24 November 1856.
- 21 *Ibid.*
- 22 J. Baxter Langley, 'The National Sunday League in Canterbury', *Daily News*, 24 November 1856.
- 23 *Ibid.*

- 24 'The League at Canterbury', *National Sunday League Record*, December 1856, p. 62; 'The National Sunday League in Canterbury', *Daily News*, 24 November 1856.
- 25 'Canterbury Again', *National Sunday League Record*, January 1857, p. 69.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 'The National Sunday League', *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, 22 November 1857.
- 28 'Mr. Maguire and the Sunday League', *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, 6 December 1857.
- 29 'The Exeter Hall Discussion Report', *National Sunday League Record*, June 1858, p. 238.
- 30 A Member of Mr. Langley's Electoral Committee, *A Brief Biography of J. Baxter Langley, M.R.C.S. & F.L.S. Together with Some of his Speeches Delivered in Greenwich, Deptford, & Woolwich in the Year 1866* (London: Riley & Couchman, 1867) p. 3.
- 31 Langley's entire argument, along with details of the debate, was later made available as John Baxter Langley, *Sabbatism: A Heresy of the Modern Christian Church*.
- 32 Langley, *Sabbatism*, p. 6.
- 33 Ibid., p. 8.
- 34 Deut xxvii. 7 in Langley, *Sabbatism*, p. 10.
- 35 Ibid., p. 15.
- 36 Langley, *Sabbatism*, pp. 20–21.
- 37 Robert Maguire, 'The Sabbath Question', *Daily Chronicle*, 17 December 1857.
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 Ibid.
- 40 J. Baxter Langley, 'The Sabbath Question', *Daily Chronicle*, 17 December 1857.
- 41 Ibid.
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- 43 Robert Maguire to the Committee of the Sunday League, 23 April 1858, *National Sunday League Record*, June 1858, p. 240.
- 44 'Advertisement', *National Sunday League Record*, May 1858, p. 232.
- 45 'National Sunday League', *Daily News*, 19 January 1858; 'National Sunday League', *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, 24 January 1858.
- 46 'The Sabbath Question', *Glasgow Herald*, 12 November 1858; *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, January 1859.
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- 48 'A Heresy', *National Sunday League Record*, December 1858, p. 330.
- 49 'Mr Kenny at Canterbury meeting of the National Sunday League', *National Sunday League Record*, April 1857, p. 92; 'Forty Thousand Sixpences', *National Sunday League Record*, March 1859, p. 378.

- 50 'Mr. Baxter Langley', *Reynold's Newspaper*, 20 February 1859; 'Christian Journals and their Correspondents', *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, 27 February 1859.
- 51 'The League and the 'National Protestant Society'', *National Sunday League Record*, May 1858, p. 225.
- 52 'Summary', *Liverpool Mercury*, 28 April 1858.
- 53 'The League and the National Protestant Society', *National Sunday League Record*, May 1858, pp. 225–26; 'The National Protest Society', *The Englishwoman's Review and Home Newspaper*, 1 May 1858; 'Summary', *Liverpool Mercury*, 28 April 1858. *The Englishwoman's Review*, however, confused the League speaker, Baxter Langley, with the debate's moderator Mr Robert Bagster and described the participation of a Mr Bagster Langley.
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- 56 Ibid.
- 57 'The National Sunday League Excursion', *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, 22 September 1867; 'The National Sunday League's Excursion to Box Hill', *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, 28 July 1867.
- 58 'Excursion to Kew', *National Sunday League Record*, September 1858. This was also published in the *People's Paper*, 14 August 1858. Langley was by this time the proprietor of this newspaper.
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- 61 Clyde Binfield, *George Williams and the Young Men's Christian Association: A Study in Victorian Social Values* (London: Cornerstone, 1973) p. 175.
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- 63 'Crystal Palace', *Morning Chronicle*, 18 December 1857; 'Crystal Palace', *Morning Post*, 18 December 1857; 'Crystal Palace Company', *Daily News*, 18 December 1857; 'Crystal Palace Company', *Morning Chronicle*, 12 December 1857.
- 64 'Rendell v. The Crystal Palace Company', *National Sunday League Record*, April 1858, p. 206.
- 65 'Crystal Palace Company', *Daily News*, 1 July 1858.
- 66 Ibid.
- 67 Henry George Bohn (ed.), *Crystal Palace Deed of Settlement: Royal Charters, and List of Shareholders* (London: H.G. Bohn, 1856) pp. 78–79.
- 68 'Crystal Palace Company', *Daily News*, 1 July 1858.
- 69 Colney Hatch was the site of a large mental institution.
- 70 'Crystal Palace Company', *Daily News*, 1 July 1858.
- 71 'The Crystal Palace and Sunday Opening', *National Sunday League Record*, January 1859, pp. 348–49.

- 72 'The Record—Metropolis—Monthly Meeting at Anderton's Hotel, Sept. 22, 1858', *National Sunday League Record*, October 1858, p. 304; 'The Archbishop of Canterbury', *National Sunday League Record*, September 1858, p. 289.
- 73 'The Crystal Palace and Sunday Opening', *National Sunday League Record*, January 1859, pp. 348–49.
- 74 'Gleanings', *National Sunday League Record*, March 1859, p. 391.
- 75 'The Sunday Opening of the Crystal Palace', *National Sunday League Record*, September 1858, p. 288.
- 76 'The Crystal Palace Company', *Morning Post*, 16 December 1858.
- 77 Ibid.
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- 80 'The National Sunday League and Crystal Palace Share Club', *Era*, 3 September 1865.
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- 82 29 Chas. II. C. 7. Stipulated 'that no tradesman, artificer, workman, labourer or other person whatsoever shall do, or exercise any worldly labour, business or work, of their ordinary calling on the Lord's Day'. Robert Tyas, *The Handbook of Commercial Law* (London: Clarke Printers, 1840) p. 30.
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- 84 'The Leigh Haymaking Case', *Wrexham Advertiser, Denbighshire, Flintshire, Cheshire and North Wales Register*, 10 October 1863; 'Sunday Haymaking at Leigh', *Standard*, 30 September 1863; 'The Leigh Hay-Making Case—Defence of the Magistrates', *Morning Post*, 24 September 1863; 'The Law on Sunday Labour', *Daily News*, 28 September 1863; 'The Leigh Hay-Making Case', *Daily News*, 28 September 1863.
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- 86 'The National Sunday League', *Daily News*, 6 September 1865.
- 87 J. Baxter Langley, *The Churches of the Past and the Church of the Future, Being a Discourse on the Indifference of the People to the Theological Organizations of the 19th Century* (London: Trubner, 1867) p. 9.
- 88 Ibid., p. 4.
- 89 'A New Sunday Movement', *Morning Post*, 8 January 1866.
- 90 'Sunday Evenings for the People', *Daily News*, 8 January 1866.
- 91 This is the same James Bowring that Langley had criticised so vehemently in the pages of the *Morning Star*. Although responsible for the Second Chinese Opium war he was also a Unitarian, a member of the peace society and the foremost linguist of his day, said to be able to speak 100 languages and understand twice that number.
- 92 'Eleanor Marx, Letter to Johann Philipp Becker, January 29, 1866', in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 20 (New York: International Publishers, 1985) p. 390.

- 93 Under Sunday Act, 21 Geo. III, c. 49.
- 94 ‘Stoppage of the Sunday Evenings For The People’, *Daily News*, 29 January 1866.
- 95 ‘Spension [sic] of the Sunday Evenings For The People’, *Reynold’s Newspaper*, 4 February 1866.
- 96 Langley, *The Churches of the Past*, p. 11; Wigley, *Victorian Sunday*, p. 125; ‘Spension [sic] of the Sunday Evenings For The People’, *Reynold’s Newspaper*, 4 February 1866.
- 97 Robert Baxter, *Liberalism Revolutionary, Emancipation an Apostasy Leading to Britain’s Awful Visitation* (London: Andrew Panton, 1829) p. 21.
- 98 Abraham Herbert Lewis, D.D., *A Critical History of Sunday Legislation From 321 to 1888 A.D.* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1888) p. 112.
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- 101 ‘The Sunday Evenings For The People’, *Morning Post*, 15 January 1868.
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- 103 *Ibid.*
- 104 *Verbatim Report of the Judgment in the Case of Baxter v. Langley by Mr. Justice Byles in the Court of Common Pleas, Westminster Hall, On Thursday, November 19th, 1868* (London: W. Austin, 1868) p. 2.
- 105 *Ibid.*, p. 3.
- 106 Sunday Evenings for the People, *Verbatim Report of the Judgment in the Case of Baxter v. Langley*, pp. 1–4.
- 107 James A. Paterson, MA, *The Liberty of the Press, Speech and Public Worship, Being Commentaries on the Liberty of the Subject and the Laws of England* (London: F.B. Rothman, 1880) p. 21; Charles L. Scanlan, LL.B., *The Clergyman’s Hand-Book of Law: The Law of Church and Grave* (New York: Benziger Brothers, Printers to the Holy Apostolic See, 1909) p. 31; Walter Shirley, *A Selection of Leading Cases in the Common Law* (London: Stevens and Sons, 1908) p. 221.
- 108 Sen S.C., Calcutta High Court, *Commissioner of Income-Tax v Upper Ganges Sugar Mills Ltd.*, 13 December 1984, *Indian Kanoon* <*Beyond the Scientology Case: Towards a Better Definition of What Constitutes a Religion for Legal Purposes in Australia Having Regard to Salient Judicial Authorities From the United States of America As Well As Non-Judicial Authorities* (Unpublished PhD Thesis: University of Technology, Sydney, 2006) p. viii; Sir Peter Benson Maxwell and W. Wyatt Paine, *On the Interpretation of Statutes* (London: Sweet and Maxwell, 1920) p. 575.
- 109 Walter White, *Journals of Dr White, Assistant Secretary to the Royal Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) pp. 266–67.
- 110 ‘Summary of This Morning’s News’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 26 December 1868.
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- 113 *Ibid.*

Contesting Prejudice, 1870

On 10 October 1888, the prominent social activist Josephine Butler (1828–1906) wrote to fellow campaigner, Miss Priestman:

My dear friend,

I felt so sorry for Baxter Langley that I wrote to ask him to apply to you, not to worry your purse but I thought a small subscription might be arranged. Jacob Bright has sent £2 they really seem to be starving. Baxter Langley did us good service and it was not in connection with our cause that he went wrong, but in connection with some building society funds, in London. There was a trial, you may recollect when some persons were sentenced to long periods of imprisonment for embezzlement of funds, and Langley was accused of being accessory to the fact, but some people thought this was not ever clearly proved. I fear however there was enough to cast a slight on him as a businessman, and he has had a very great struggle since.¹

Langley had met Josephine Butler through their shared opposition to—and active campaigning against—the Contagious Diseases Acts. Introduced in 1864, these Acts were an attempt to stem the rising level of sexually transmitted disease in the British armed forces. Although such infection had always been present, the manpower losses sustained during the Crimean conflict (1853–1856) had made it both undeniable and, for the authorities, impossible to ignore. One military report stated:

On the 1st of May the fourth draft arrived in the steamship, *Alma*, consisting of six officers and 307 men, whose average age was 22 ½ years, and service seven months . . . of the men comprising this

draft, which was inspected by the surgeon previously to its disembarkation, twenty-four were at once sent to the Hospital, whose maladies (with the exception of one case of Small Pox), were nearly all included under the head 'Venereal Disease'.²

Naval reports gave similarly alarming figures. The Ship *Cornwallis*, with a complement of 335, in 1860 reported forty-two cases of syphilis and twelve of gonorrhoea. In 1861 this had risen to seventy-five cases of syphilis and twenty of gonorrhoea.³ To make matters worse, these figures were considerably higher than those for Britain's continental neighbours. In the Belgian armed forces between 1863 and 1868, for example, the average annual loss through venereal disease was 2.96 days per soldier. In England from 1860 to 1867 the figure was 7.44 days.⁴

What infuriated reformers such as Butler and Langley was the fact that the Contagious Diseases Acts made no attempt to address the behaviour of the enlisted men and thus represented an implicit acceptance of male sexual promiscuity. The Acts concentrated exclusively upon the regulation and treatment of prostitution, and by doing so placed blame entirely upon the female participant. As Langley himself put it, 'only one, instead of both of the offenders—as in every other crime—was punished'.⁵ To enforce this punishment the legislation recommended that a 'system of periodic fortnightly inspection or examination of all known prostitutes be made compulsory, under a well organised system of medical police'.⁶ Initially, this was for a trial period and only in the immediate vicinity of the military or naval bases at Portsmouth, Plymouth, Woolwich, Chatham, Sheerness, Aldershot, Colchester, Shorncliffe, Curragh, Cork and Queenstown. In 1866, however, a further Act extended the legislation's duration from the original three years, expanded its jurisdiction around designated areas to 15 miles, and broadened the Acts' authority to include the towns of Canterbury, Devonport, Dover, Gravesend, Maidstone, Winchester and, most notably, the civilian port of Southampton.⁷

In addition to the Acts' unfairness, a further concern for reformers such as Langley was the inordinate power that it granted to the police. Previous legislation had required the testimony of an infected soldier or sailor be given to officers before they detained a suspected prostitute. Under the Contagious Diseases Acts, a new branch of the police, working under-cover and in plain clothes, patrolled the designated areas. The mere suspicion of any such officer was sufficient for a woman to be taken forcibly into custody. The suspect could then submit to an internal medical examination or be brought

before a magistrate and—provided police suspicions were considered reasonable—be examined without her consent. If infection was found to be present, she was then sentenced to compulsory incarceration in a ‘lock hospital’ or ‘lock ward’ for a period up to three months. Subsequent fortnightly testing was imposed and failure to attend was punishable by imprisonment.⁸ Such powers gave the police involved unprecedented authority. Those apprehended were often uneducated, and many were illiterate, meaning few were able to challenge their accusers and fewer still willing to risk further punishment by demanding a court appearance. In many cases, the detained women were either incapable of reading the documents of consent or were not given the opportunity. Many reported that police threatened them with prison if they withheld their signature. Sarah Jennings, gave testimony of such misconduct to the *Report of Messrs Shaen and Roscoe upon the working of the Contagious Diseases Acts at Canterbury*:

Sarah Jennings of no 4 Church Lane, 19 years old lives with parents. Says she has been seduced by a soldier but is not a prostitute. Officers came to her Mother’s house and ordered her to go to Hawkes Lane. She went there and signed a paper. Did not know what it was. Was then examined and sent to a Hospital in London. Was kept there 6 weeks. Has not been to Hawkes Lane since but has met officers in the street and they told her if she came out at night they would send her there again. Has been in constant work at Greens Rag factory for 6 years but has lost her situation through being sent away and is now out of employment. Her parents have a large family and are very poor.⁹

For Langley there were also personal reasons for opposing the directive’s implementation. Woolwich, one of the first areas placed under the statutes, was within the Parliamentary borough of Greenwich. He had many times visited this area and by the time of the Acts’ introduction had expressed ambitions to stand for the seat as an ‘Advanced Liberal’.¹⁰ Langley’s close interaction with the concerns of Woolwich, Greenwich and Deptford residents ensured that he was to take an active role in the opposition.¹¹ This commenced in October 1869 with the founding of the ‘National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts’.¹² Soon afterwards an exclusively female branch was established: the Ladies National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts.¹³ On 19 January 1870, around forty male campaigners—including Langley and Thomas Allsop—established a London-based

organisation, the Metropolitan Anti-Contagious Diseases Acts Association, to 'act in cordial co-operation with the existing Ladies Association'.¹⁴

Pro-legislation groups were also active and Langley and his confederates faced well-funded and organised opposition.¹⁵ The Committee of the Harveian Society for the Prevention of Venereal Diseases, for example, held its first meeting in March 1867 and boasted that 'Venereal diseases among the men of the Garrison towns has not only been diminished by one half but the severity of the disease has greatly diminished in the women under treatment'.¹⁶ This, it claimed, meant that 'the police surveillance embodied in the Contagious Diseases Act should be applied as far as possible to the civil community generally'. The same year saw the foundation of the Association for Promoting the Extension of the Contagious Diseases Acts of 1866 to the Civilian Population. Branch associations were established in thirty-two provincial towns and more than four hundred members enrolled. The extension of the Acts to Southampton—the first civilian port to come under its jurisdiction—was seen by many opponents as merely the first move towards the legislation being implemented nationwide.

On 29 March 1870, Langley travelled to Southampton to join local organiser and Unitarian, the Reverend Edmund Kell (1799–1874), in rallying opposition to the legislation. Upon taking the stand, Langley stated his regret that the meeting was a male-only affair, as 'it was always beneficial when they came under the influence of pure, high-minded women'.¹⁷ In doing so he was directly challenging one of the primary arguments employed by the Acts' supporters. This was that prostitution, let alone its associated medical problems, were subjects that no 'respectable' woman should be aware of, much less be involved with politically.¹⁸ Such preconceptions represented a major obstacle to repealers. When the Acts were discussed in the Commons in 1878, for example, there were calls for the Public Gallery to be closed. An exception was made only when it was assumed that the 'good sense' of the journalists present would preclude them from reporting 'anything offensive to the general public'.¹⁹ *The Times*, on 21 July 1870, had already taken this one step further and demanded of those opposed to the Acts, 'Why not leave alone what others must handle and themselves need not even know about?'²⁰ For Langley and Kell such decorum was of little use to those (largely working-class) women at the mercy of the newly empowered secret police and their opposition to the legislation would be futile if those most affected could not be encouraged to speak out against it.²¹

Langley's speech, and the arguments he employed—both at Southampton and elsewhere—were later published as a pamphlet *The Application of the*

Contagious Diseases Act to Southampton: Mr Langley's Address. First, he accused the proponents of dishonesty over the way in which the Acts had been introduced into Parliament. The Contagious Diseases Acts had been proposed by Sir Clarence Paget (1811–1895), Secretary to the Admiralty (and later Lord Paget), on 20 June 1864 without debate and had been passed barely a month later, at 2am and with hardly fifty members present. Many, allegedly including Queen Victoria herself, had assumed that it referred to veterinary rather than human matters; there being the similarly entitled Contagious Diseases Acts (Cattle) being debated around the same time.²² Had the true nature of the legislation been known, Langley argued, many would have voted against it. Members such as Charles Gilpin and Jacob Bright had confirmed to him their regret that they had not been better informed.²³ The Act's proposers had therefore 'preferred a policy of secrecy and adopting a name which did not even carry to the general intelligence the nature of the Acts', which was an affront to the rights of freeborn English men and women.²⁴

Langley then suggested that rather than venereal disease being the result of immoral and infected prostitutes it was an inevitable consequence of British military policy. Barely six out of every 100 British servicemen were granted leave to marry and this demanded an unenforceable degree of celibacy amongst the enlisted men. It was this restrictive regulation that led to the men visiting prostitutes.²⁵ If a large standing army was to be maintained—and Langley questioned the need for such a force—then:

His contention was that it would be far better and cheaper, pecuniary and in a moral and social point of view, to have an increased vote in the estimates for accommodation for married soldiers (hear, hear), than to sacrifice the health, or mortality, or religious sentiment of a country (applause).²⁶

Having criticised the morality of, and need for, the Acts, Langley then questioned their effectiveness. Catholic Rome, where similar regulation was in place, was offered as proof that the legislation failed to stem the spread of infection.²⁷ In fact, he argued, the *Regolamentazione* system had criminalised the infected, ensuring that 'instead of being registered [prostitutes] sought to evade the law, and consequently avoided legitimate modes of treatment'.²⁸

Finally, Langley turned to the hypocrisy of those in power condemning women for selling sexual favours while simultaneously preventing their obtaining a living in any other fashion.²⁹ Whilst admitting that contributory factors such as the 'mistakes and pride of parents' and 'the extravagance of women'

(which he believed delayed marriage) existed, Langley argued that the primary cause of prostitution was the unequal status of women within society:³⁰

[society] had much to answer for in this respect; and trades' unions, including his own medical profession, were also to blame for the prohibitive restrictions they had imposed upon the employment of women, and in regard to medicine, of that branch of the profession that he held to be their natural department.³¹

This double standard ensured that

Many of these poor creatures were deprived of the means of earning a livelihood, and driven to acts of desperation . . . whilst the men who had brought this degradation upon them were received in the very best society . . . the greatest lady-killer among them—was considered the hero of the ballroom and the idol of the hour.³²

The Contagious Diseases Acts, he concluded, were introduced by '*diletantti*, people who dealt with symptoms and not with causes'.³³

The courage required for expressing such a radical position was clearly shown in the furious response that Langley's speech incited. The anonymous 'One Who Was Present' had attended the meeting to see 'what arguments could be brought to bear against the most salutary and excellent decision the legislature has arrived at'.³⁴ He then wrote to the *Hampshire Advertiser* to express his 'utter disappointment, I had almost said disgust' at the claims of Langley, who he deemed an 'apologist for the prostitute'.³⁵ A series of ill-tempered and accusatory letters followed. 'One Who Was Present' asserted that Langley was a hypocrite who decried the lack of work opportunities for women but employed none himself on his newspapers.³⁶ Langley responded that although the charge was true:

I would employ female composers if I could . . . that I *cannot* do so is one of the facts I brought forward in my address, to show the difficulties in the way of female employment.³⁷

'One Who Was Present' then (somewhat disingenuously) accused Langley of a 'foul and scandalous libel' and of claiming that the whole female population of Rome was 'reeking with impurity, from top to bottom, without

exception'.³⁸ Langley wrote citing Acton's *Prostitution Considered in its Moral, Social and Sanitary Aspects, in London and Other Large Cities*. Of the *Regolamentazione*, system it said:

As a consequence of this disastrous rule, prostitution in Rome is more or less all-pervading. It is carried on alas! Too often in families, under the parental eye, almost as though it were an admissible calling.³⁹

A third exchange of letters descended into little more than insult. 'One Who Was Present' claimed that 'in his terrible anxiety to save the *gay ladies*' Langley had produced 'the greatest "bosh" ever written'.⁴⁰ Indicative of many wealthy male supporters of the Acts, however, was 'One Who Was There's explanation for the causes of prostitution. Rather than this being economic necessity, he declared:

every man of the world knows full well that the primary cause of prostitution is the frightful and alarming increase in the love of dress among the young girls of this country.⁴¹

Langley returned to Southampton on 26 April 1870 for a second opposition meeting to find that 'One Who Was Present' and those of his ilk were well prepared.⁴² The format of the talk had been announced previously and consisted of Langley explaining the workings of the Acts; fifteen minutes then being allotted for counter-arguments; and a further ten minutes for other opinions; before the meeting concluded with Langley responding to any points raised. A well-organised pro-legislation lobby was present, however, and upon taking the stage Langley was deluged with accusations of unfairness; a Mr Burbage loudly complained of the time limits imposed by the organisers; Mr T. Falvey insisted that all speakers should debate on 'equal terms'; and Alderman Joseph Stebbing (1808–1874), who appeared to be the ringleader of the hecklers, interjected to demand that the meeting be cancelled and rescheduled for a later date. Stebbing, with good reason, 'had no doubt the mayor would allow them the Guildhall'.⁴³ Each time Langley was interrupted there were rousing cheers and when Langley's supporter, Dr Hearne, attempted to address the crowd he could not be heard above the jeers of the hecklers.

What makes the meeting especially worthy of note was the identity of the hecklers, all of whom were both wealthy and influential, and the fact that Langley had been warned beforehand of their intentions. Joseph Stebbing, who

boasted of having been at the previous meeting (and is likely to have been the anonymous 'One Who Was Present'), had been Mayor of Southampton in 1867, was a magistrate and also a Provincial Grand Secretary of the Southampton Freemasons.⁴⁴ At a Town Council meeting the previous week, Stebbing and other local luminaries had discussed the Contagious Diseases Acts and passed a motion calling on the Admiralty 'to take immediate steps for carrying out the provisions of the Act in this town'.⁴⁵ That Langley was aware of this—and his tormentors' identity—was shown in the fact he countered accusations of unfairness by pointing out that Stebbing had already 'had the opportunity of speaking on the matter in another place where he [Langley] could not answer him'.⁴⁶ In a further attempt to disconcert Langley, the well-heeled and influential body of hecklers turned en masse to leave the building the moment Langley commenced his speech.⁴⁷

The threat that the Contagious Diseases Acts represented to the freedom of ordinary working-class women and the unqualified support offered by powerful men such as Joseph Stebbing is further shown in the words of William Harris the Assistant Chief Commissioner for the Metropolitan Police. In May 1870, Langley wrote to *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper* to expose the imprecise and easily abused wording of the Acts. Police were empowered to apprehend any woman suspected of being a 'common prostitute' but there was no definition of what a 'common prostitute' was, nor what constituted reasonable evidence of a woman being one. Harris, addressing the House of Lords investigative committee, had stated:

I should propose that any woman who goes to places of public resort and is known to go with different men, although not a common streetwalker, should be served with a notice to register [on a legal list of known prostitutes].⁴⁸

This, Langley suggested, gave to individual policemen the authority to detain any woman they saw fit and rendered

the most virtuous of our wives or sisters or daughters liable to be insulted by a policeman, and upon his dictum violated by an examining surgeon.⁴⁹

Police powers and the potential for their abuse were again raised the following month and Langley was once more to take a prominent role. On 10 June 1870, a Dr Rule addressed a public repeal meeting at the Plymouth Mechanics' Institute. Here he detailed the case of a local woman who—to safeguard her

anonymity—was known only as ‘A.B.’. Despite being in no way involved in solicitation, ‘A. B.’ had been taken into custody where police had intimidated her into submitting to an internal examination. A member of the audience, Thomas Woollcombe, ‘a gentleman of considerable local influence, of great business ability deeply convinced of the advantages of preventative legislation against syphilis’ rose to contest this account of events, insisting that, rather than an innocent, ‘A.B.’ was ‘a notorious prostitute’ and had been apprehended by police whilst leaving a brothel.⁵⁰ Woollcombe had good reasons for defending the Contagious Diseases Acts in Plymouth. He was the Chairman of the Royal Albert Hospital, Devonport, which was the only Hospital in the district that received patients under the Acts. As such, it received generous financial support from the authorities.⁵¹ Woollcombe then issued a public challenge for ‘any gentleman to prove a single case of abuse of the Contagious Diseases Acts within the district’.

Langley immediately accepted this challenge. Both pro- and anti-legislation activists agreed to investigate the case of ‘A.B.’ and meet the following month at the Duke of Cornwall Hotel, Plymouth for a mock trial.⁵² Three arbiters were appointed to decide the case: one chosen by the supporters of the Acts; one by its opponents; and a third being a neutral agreed by both parties. This was given considerable publicity within the local papers, particularly the *Western Daily Mercury* and *Western Daily Press*.⁵³

The case—and proof of police misuse of the Acts provisions—rested upon the testimony of a single police officer Inspector Silas Annis (1831–1914).⁵⁴ It had been Annis, acting as the Chief of the Plymouth ‘Water Police’ who had detained ‘A.B.’. He was also a close confederate of Woollcombe and a man well known for his zealous enforcement of the Acts. Despite being a senior officer, Annis was twice summoned himself, once for breaking and entering a woman’s room and once for an assault on a ‘respectable working woman’.⁵⁵ In the latter case, he had denied being present and claimed another man had impersonated him. When this was accepted:

The decision was at first received with slight applause, which however was immediately followed by a violent and emphatic outburst of dissent from all parts of the court . . . Men and women—indeed, the women seemed ten times more fierce than the men—stamped their feet, shook their fists, and fairly grinned at the magistrates, and it was surprising that no arrests were made.⁵⁶

Police historian Christopher Forester also claims of Annis:

Such was his reputation that people would use his name to warn their children to behave some 20 years after he left the Force.⁵⁷

Woollcombe used the columns of the *Western Daily Mercury* to repeat his claims that 'A.B.' was 'a notorious prostitute', that she had been apprehended leaving a brothel and that 'her parents were long ago aware of her improper conduct'.⁵⁸ Anniss gave similar testimony to the paper and declared that 'The girl was loose before she was examined but to save her after the examination he had got her a place as a servant'.⁵⁹ The father of the accused 'A.B.' denied these 'unfounded and incorrect' accusations, stating that he 'had no knowledge of such improper conduct'.⁶⁰ Furthermore, he contradicted Anniss's account of the girl's apprehension. Rather than being detained after leaving a brothel, Anniss and another officer had come to the family home and 'frightened the girl into going with them at once to be examined'.⁶¹ Such behaviour was certainly in keeping with the officer's *modus operandi*. The following year it was claimed that Anniss, in his own time, visited the home of a woman seeking to have her name removed from the list of common prostitutes, warning her that 'she had done quite wrong in approaching a magistrate'.⁶²

These conflicting accounts served only to highlight the propensity of the Acts to be misapplied. Proving beyond doubt that this had occurred was, however, a far more difficult task. Although many witnesses professed to the good character of 'A.B.', this was not, in itself, proof of her innocence. Furthermore, the police refused to give more than the most perfunctory testimony. Primary witness Silas Anniss declared that the woman 'had been repeatedly seen coming out of brothels', but, when pressed, refused to give details of when this was or where the brothels were situated. In fact, not only did the police refuse to co-operate, they used information from hostile witnesses. One of these, W. Morgan, cited an ex-prostitute, now living respectably, who had repeatedly and unsuccessfully requested her name be removed from the register of prostitutes.⁶³ Woollcombe declared this to be 'a complete untruth' but promised that if details of the case were given 'no unfair advantage would be taken'. The following week police descended upon the woman at her home, an address previously unknown to them, and demanded that she attend a further examination.⁶⁴

With the police refusing to provide any details of 'A.B.'s supposed wrongdoing it was effectively impossible to prove that they had acted improperly in detaining her. The Acts' defenders, with no such burden of proof, simply insisted that no misuse of the Acts had been established. Also unrevealed

until after the meeting was the predisposition of one of the arbiters. Alex Hubbard, the supposedly neutral third arbiter—joining Alfred Rooker, a Plymouth solicitor proposed by the opponents of the Acts and J.N. Bennett, a second local solicitor by its defenders—also sat on the committee of the Royal Albert Lock Hospital, and so maintained a vested interest in the case being discredited.⁶⁵ Despite this, the arbiters' decision was equivocal. They concluded:

1. From the evidence adduced we do not consider that an abuse of the Acts has been proved.
2. At the same time, having regard to the testimony borne by many respectable persons to the good conduct of A.B., both before and since her treatment under the Acts, and to other circumstances, we have arrived at the above conclusion, not without hesitation, and as, strictly indicating a balance of opinion only, on a full review of the entire case.⁶⁶

Langley's involvement in the opposition took a new, and more confrontational, approach later in 1870 when Sir Henry Storks (1811–1874)—a prominent supporter of the Acts—sought to enter politics as a Member of Parliament. Storks had served as Governor of the Ionian islands of Zante, Cephalonia and Corfu and of Malta from 1864 to 1867 and was concurrently Governor of Jamaica in 1865–66. Under his governorship all suspected prostitutes had undergone compulsory inspection by a police physician three times a month. Statistics gathered during this period had been submitted to the 1867 'Report of the Committee Appointed to Enquire into the Pathology and Treatment of the Venereal Disease, with a View to Diminish its Injurious Effects on the Men of the Army and Navy (Skey Committee)' of 1864–65, and had been hailed as definitive proof of the Acts' effectiveness.⁶⁷ In Parliament his actions had not only been lauded as a victory over infection but as a force for moral reclamation and rehabilitation:

The operation of the law has had the effect of checking public prostitution to a great extent, besides of almost annihilating the disease . . . But if evidence be worth anything, there is not the slightest doubt that large numbers of them have been reclaimed from vice and now lead virtuous lives. In Malta, where the experience had been longest, this reclamation is described as one of the most marked and happy features of the Act.⁶⁸

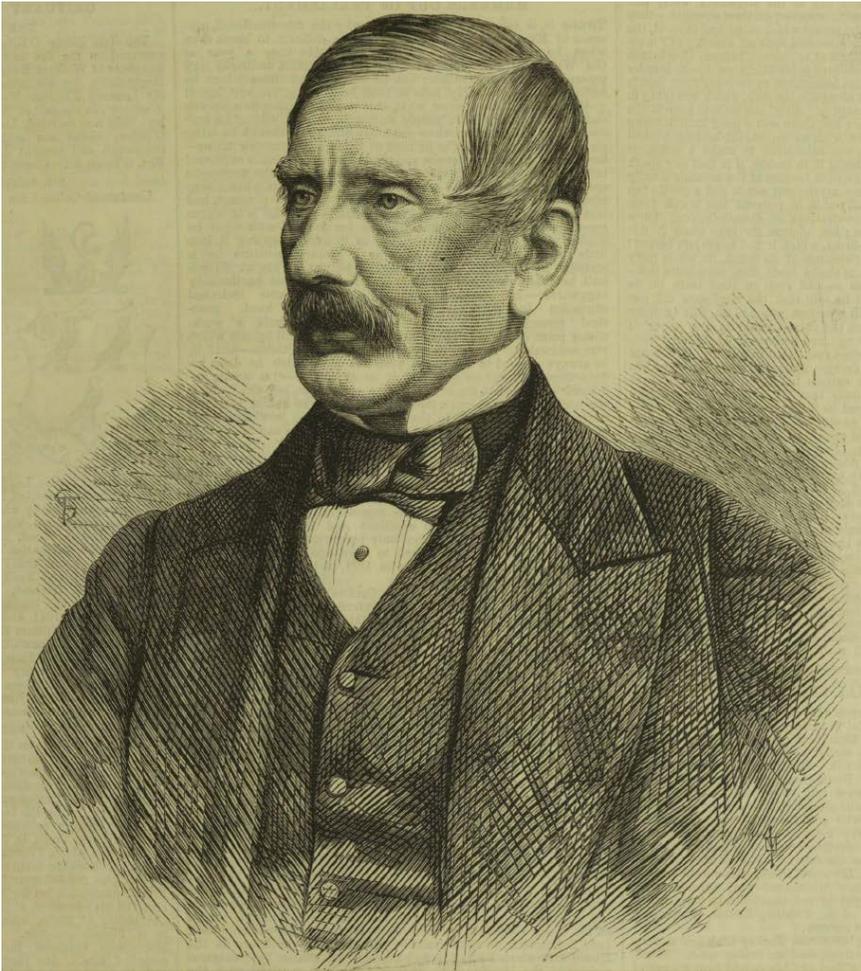


Figure 9: Sir Henry Storks (*Illustrated London News*, 11 January 1868).

Gladstone, who as Prime Minister was embroiled in the implementation of a far-reaching reorganisation of the armed forces—which including the controversial abolition of the purchase system—saw in Storks an experienced military reformer and in August 1870 appointed him Surveyor-General of the Ordnance; the first person to take this position since the Crimean War. The death of the standing Liberal MP for Newark, Edward Denison in January 1870 enabled the further advancement of Storks and Gladstone not only encouraged him to stand but wrote to the local candidate, Sir George Grey (1799–1882), telling him ‘I earnestly desire the return of Sir Henry Storks’, and requesting that he stand aside in the coming by-election.⁶⁹

If this was a chance for Storks to enter Parliament, it was also an opportunity for the Acts' opponents to strike at the very heart of its support base. Their attempts to undermine and prevent Storks's election became the most significant political operation by the reformers in 1870 and played a far-reaching role in the eventual repeal of the legislation. As soon as the electioneering for Newark had commenced, two prominent activists, Dr Charles Bell Taylor and Thomas Worth, had travelled to the constituency. Storks had famously testified before the 1864–65 Skey Committee that 'I am of the opinion that very little benefit will result from the best-devised means of prevention until prostitution is recognised as a necessity'.⁷⁰ Although the intended meaning had been that it was a necessity for the state to grapple with the problem of prostitution, the statement was seen as an exploitable weakness, and posters bearing these words were distributed around Newark.

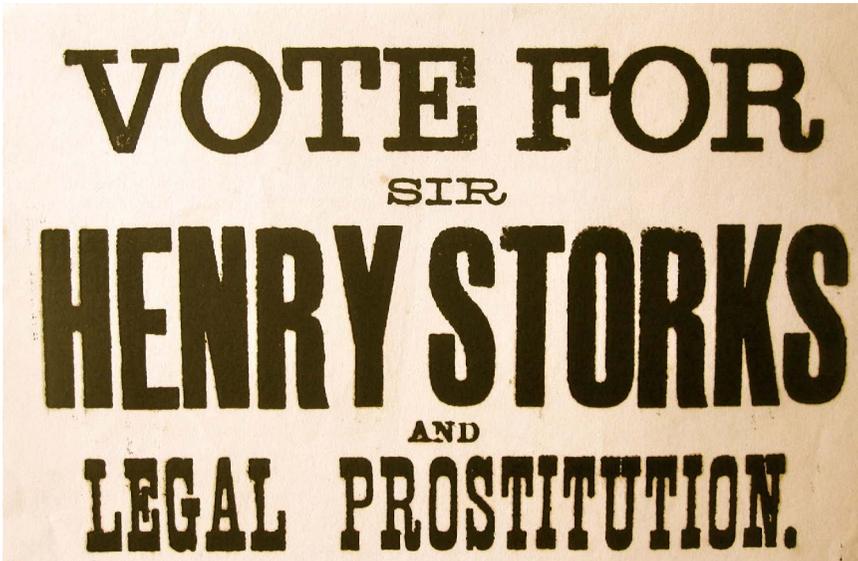


Figure 10: Election poster of 1870 (FAW/Box285/3hjuw/f/0/).

The statistics given to the Skey Committee were challenged publicly and constant questioning on the Contagious Diseases Acts interrupted Storks's election meetings.⁷¹ Further publicity came in the form of a carriage, which toured the city bearing the message 'If you want a repeal of the Contagious Diseases (Women) Acts vote for [rival candidate] Bristowe'. Samuel Boteler Bristowe (1822–1897), alongside Sir George Grey and even the Conservative candidate Sergeant Sleight, had been induced to declare their opposition to the Acts leaving Storks as its only open supporter.⁷² Finally, the Newark radical Joseph Arch

(1826–1919) had been contacted by Josephine Butler and persuaded to publicly renounce his support for Storks.⁷³ This constant stream of criticism had a cumulative effect and on 31 March, Storks retired from the contest, complaining that he had been the victim of false accusations and libel. The *Bradford Observer* was in no doubt as to the reasons for his defeat:

His advocacy of the Contagious Diseases Act caused many voters to withdraw their promises and the popular feeling against him was every hour growing in intensity.⁷⁴

Although this was a victory for the repealers, it was only a temporary one. The death of Colchester MP John Gurdon-Rebow in October 1870 left a second vacancy and Storks was again encouraged to stand. This time his prospects were said to be ‘exceedingly promising’.⁷⁵ At this point Langley took a prominent role in the campaign against Storks. To undermine Storks’s support base, the National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts determined to run a rival Liberal candidate whose sole purpose would be to highlight Storks’s support for the Acts, and in doing so split the Liberal vote. As a well-known, eloquent and above-all fearless campaigner, Langley was approached and asked to be that candidate.

For Langley it was a difficult decision. By 1870 he had ambitions to win the seat of Greenwich and though his opposition to the Contagious Diseases Acts might win him support from the radical artisans of the borough, to undermine publicly an official Liberal candidate would undoubtedly alienate the more respectable members of the Greenwich Liberal Association (see Chapter 9), to say nothing of Gladstone himself. But to refuse to stand against Storks would undoubtedly allow the Acts’ most outspoken champion to achieve a prominent and influential place in government. After some hesitation Langley therefore agreed. Leaflets were printed and notices published in local papers announcing his intention to stand, his reasons for doing so and his views on a range of other matters:

TO THE
ELECTORS
OF THE
BOROUGH OF COLCHESTER

GENTLEMEN,

The indignation which has been aroused in a large Portion of the community by the published opinion of Sir Henry Storks that ‘Prostitution is a Necessity’ and that the disgusting examinations

Legalised under the Contagious Diseases Acts should be applied to the Virtuous Wives of Soldiers has called me to the field to claim the support of the Liberal interest, with which my whole political career has been identified, and to rescue that party from the obloquy which would attach to it if it sent to parliament one of the principal supporters of the most immoral and unjust legislation which has disgraced the civilisation of Europe. The whole moral sense of the country has been revolted by those enactments which degrade women to a level of beasts and one of the objects which I hope to secure from your support is the opportunity of voting for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts.

I am in favour of perfect freedom in matters of religious opinion and should give my support to such as would give the equality of all sects in the eye of the law.

For twenty-five years I have advocated the urgent duty of the nation to take care that the whole of its children were educated in the elements of knowledge, and whilst approving of Mr. Forster's Bill of last session I should vote in favour of still more measures of general instruction. As a vice-president and one of the most active Members of the Reform League I am vain enough to believe that I contributed somewhat to secure that large measure of popular enfranchisement which was afterwards introduced; but that measure is so imperfect in its details and so inequitable in its provisions that it will require the earliest attention of all true reformers to make it a complete measure. I am in favour of the ballot.

At the last General Election although I was the Adopted candidate of the Advanced Liberal Party in Greenwich I withdrew my Candidature to secure a Seat for the present Prime Minister, whose success was threatened in South Lancashire. This sacrifice, I venture to believe, gives me some claim upon the Attention and consideration of the Liberal Party.

To the working classes I can specially appeal. I oppose all legislation for class interests, and therefore demand equality before the law for the combinations of men and the unions of the masters. The funds belonging to both are entitled to legal Protection.

I am in favour of the District Representation of Labour.

One of the first addresses which I ever delivered was In favour of the ten-hours Bill—and my opinions on The Reduction of the Hours of Labour have undergone no alteration.

The taxation of the country is not strictly fair in its Incidence, and the mode of raising the National Revenue requires careful study with a view to its amendment. The amount of the taxations is, moreover, enormous, and should be, as far as possible, reduced by a rigid determination to secure the results paid for. This is not done. Large numbers of working men are often discharged while highly paid and useless officials are retained. The complete efficiency of an army or navy is not secured by the extravagance almost invariably advocated by military men.

I am in favour of a National Citizen Army such as that of Germany, but cordially advocate arbitration as a settlement of all international disputes.

With these sentiments, which I have held and promulgated actively for many years, I venture to solicit

Your suffrages.

I am, Gentlemen, Yours faithfully,

J. BAXTER LANGLEY,

LL.D., M.R.C.S., F.L.S., &c.,

50 Lincoln's Inn Fields.

London October 22nd 1870.⁷⁶

Arriving in Colchester, Langley immediately wrote to Storke urging him to repudiate his support for the Acts:

It is with extreme regret that I find myself opposed to many old friends in the borough, and I should be sincerely glad to find that further study of this question, from a civilian point of view, has effected such a change of opinion as would enable me to pass from the ranks of opposition to co-operate with the party with whom my political career has been identified. Unless however I can satisfy

myself on this point I shall be compelled, from a stern sense of duty, to fight the battle out to the bitter end.⁷⁷

Storks responded curtly that on the subject of the Contagious Diseases Acts he had 'Nothing further to add'.⁷⁸

Reprinted in *The Shield* and distributed as an election leaflet, the letter also contained a number of awkward questions for the official candidate.⁷⁹ These included:

In your letter to Professor Skey in the appendix to your report of the Committee, p. 132, you advise that soldiers should be encouraged to give information as to the women who diseased them, although your experience indicates that they often criminate the wrong woman, whose person is legally violated by the police-surgeon upon such false information. Have you seen reason to modify that view?⁸⁰

A second question was:

In the same letter you say 'It is to be regretted that the women of regiments' (that is, soldier's wives) 'cannot be inspected as well as the men.' Do you still maintain this opinion, and if so would you have the system applied to the wives of the officers also?⁸¹

And finally:

You say that 'very little good will arise until PROSTITUTION is regarded as a NECESSITY.' Do you still maintain this opinion, and if not, to what extent has further consideration modified your views?⁸²

Liberal newspapers reacted to Langley's nomination with anger, seeing his candidature as a boon to the Conservatives and a betrayal of reformist interests. The *Bristol Mercury* reported that 'The Liberals of Colchester are smitten with the insane spirit of disunion', while the *Birmingham Daily Post* complained that 'The Liberals are playing the old game at Colchester, to the intense disgust of all sensible people and the ill-concealed gratification of the Tories'. The editor of the *Post* demanded to know:

If Mr Baxter Langley is so anxious not to weaken the Liberal cause, why should he oppose a man who is a sound Liberal merely because on *one* question he differs from himself? Mr. Baxter Langley knows that he has not a ghost of a chance at Colchester, and that by persistence he can only let in a Tory. It is to be hoped that he will withdraw before the day of the poll; a course recommended to him by nearly every Liberal paper of any standing.⁸³

It is not hard to see why Langley's candidature caused such resentment. With the exception of their conflicting attitude towards the Contagious Diseases Acts, Langley and Storks shared a political affinity. Like Langley, Storks had declared himself a 'firm supporter of the ballot'; he looked upon the Education Act of the last session as a 'great step in advance' and viewed Gladstone's disestablishment of the Irish church and the Irish Land Acts as 'two great Acts of justice'.⁸⁴ Alexander Learmonth (1829–1887), their Tory opponent, could only gain by the undermining of Storks, and was in many ways Langley's political antithesis. His platform included a promise to oppose the disestablishment of the Irish Church, and any changes to the preferment of the Church of England.⁸⁵ In contrast to Langley's overt opposition to British military expansion, Learmonth berated the Liberal government for not taking bolder action in the Franco-Prussian war then raging on the Continent.⁸⁶ That the Liberal government had reduced the size of the military he described as 'despicable' and promised he would join with the other Conservatives in ensuring 'the safety of the country' (this was a direct criticism of Storks who had been instrumental in the military reorganisation under William Cardwell).⁸⁷ Most infuriating for Langley would have been Learmonth's supposed outrage, expressed in speeches throughout the campaign, regarding the closures of the Deptford and Woolwich dockyards.⁸⁸ In a speech to his supporters the Conservative Learmonth claimed that the Liberals had:

Closed many of our dockyards, and by that means, as you all know, threw upon the country a mass of operatives who had wives and families depending upon them—(cheers and dissent)—men who believed that in working for the Government in those dockyards their provision was safe. (Cheers and clamour.) And bear in mind this, that those men so discharged were our skilled artizans, who by their handy work have made our name celebrated in all countries as the most skilled in the world. (Cheers.)⁸⁹

Both Woolwich and Deptford dockyards were within the seat of Greenwich, and, unlike Learmonth, Langley had worked closely with the discharged workers in his potential constituency. Langley personally knew the ‘operatives’ and the ‘wives and families that depended upon them’; he had organised and addressed meetings, both in an attempt to facilitate the docks’ reopening and to find alternative employment for those who had lost their jobs, and had received precious little assistance from men such as Learmonth.⁹⁰ In any case, as both Langley and Learmonth would have been well aware, the Conservative was twisting the facts; the dockyards at Deptford had been closed by order of the Tory First Lord of the Admiralty, Henry Lowry-Corry (1803–1873) and, although Woolwich was ultimately decommissioned by Gladstone’s government, it followed a recommendation by the previous Conservative administration of Disraeli.⁹¹ That Learmonth could brazenly blame the Liberals and say that ‘it was false political economy to discharge those men’ would have seemed to Langley the most transparent and cynical opportunism.⁹²

Langley held his first election meeting on Tuesday, 25 October 1870, at the Colchester Theatre. Rather than make an election address, he planned to devote his speech entirely to the unfairness of the Contagious Diseases Acts and their implementation. There was little chance for him to do so, however, as in Southampton he was met by an effective and well-organised disruption of the meeting. The majority of those in attendance were said to be of ‘the rough species’.⁹³ Langley’s appearance on stage was greeted with groans, ‘discordant noises’ and cries of ‘Three cheers for Storks’. One of the protestors brandished a placard upon which was written ‘Sir Henry Storks and no Humbug’, other placards declared ‘Vote for Sir Henry Storks’ and most threateningly, ‘If you want a welcome wait until you are Axe’d’, accompanied by a crude depiction of an executioner’s cleaver. Constant interruptions followed except for a brief lull in which Langley protested; ‘You are afraid to hear me. You dare not hear me.’ This was greeted with cries of ‘We don’t want you’, ‘We have our man’ and ‘Go back to London’. A ‘well known clothiers assistant’ joined Langley on the stage and, while pointing in his direction, began laughing derisively. A resolution was then proposed:

That in the opinion of this meeting the opposition of Dr Baxter-Langley [*sic*] to the candidature of Sir Henry Storks is both impolite and unwise, unjust to Sir Henry, and disrespectful to the Liberal party of this borough; it being only calculated to produce disunion in the ranks of the Liberals, and frustrate the successes of the cause Dr Baxter-Langley [*sic*] came to Colchester especially to advocate and promote.⁹⁴

This was then carried amidst 'indescribable tumult'.⁹⁵

The following Friday Langley called a second public meeting at the Colchester Theatre. Twenty sandwich-board men had been hired from London both to advertise this and to state Langley's case. These men carried the message 'An Appeal For Fair Play', which called upon local residents to at least allow the meeting to go ahead, describing those who had disrupted the previous meeting as having 'committed an outrage upon the liberty of speech'.⁹⁶ To support the campaign Josephine Butler also travelled to Colchester bringing with her James Stuart (1843–1913)—a Cambridge Professor and supporter of women's suffrage—as well as a stack of posters drawn by Harriet Martineau and pamphlets written by John Stuart Mill.⁹⁷

Differences in approach were immediately apparent and while Langley sought to appeal to the working people of Colchester, Butler, a committed Christian, commenced her own campaign with a 'series of devotional meetings, gathering together chiefly women in groups, to ask of God that the approaching events might be overruled for good'. Other leaflets distributed were 'To the Christian Electors of Colchester' and a 'Suggested Form for Pulpit Notice' claiming that the Acts were 'directly opposed to God's law of chastity and purity'.⁹⁸

The presence of the reformers provoked open hostility from both the Tory activists and their paid supporters, but most vehemently from indignant Liberal voters. On the day of the second meeting, the hotel where Butler, Langley and Stuart were staying was surrounded by an angry mob. Butler recorded that 'Their deep throated yells and oaths, and the horrible words spoken by them, sounded sadly in my ears'.⁹⁹ Langley and Stuart deposited both their wallets and watches with Butler for safekeeping before venturing outside. Once they had left a hail of stones was launched against the windows of Butler's room and she was forced to flee to the attic for safety. A similar crowd awaited Langley at the Colchester Theatre.¹⁰⁰ The moment the doors were opened men holding red bills bearing the slogan 'Vote for Sir Henry Storks' filled the boxes, pit and gallery. As Langley approached the stage there were cries of 'We will not hear you!', 'Three cheers for Storks!' and, 'Three cheers for Dr Brewer!'. Despite these interruptions Langley commenced his speech:¹⁰¹

Gentlemen,—I have found English spirit in every town in England I ever visited, and I have yet to discover that I shall appeal to the men of Colchester and not find English spirit there. If you are Englishmen, as I believe you are, I appeal to your sense of fair play. I come among you simply by that right which every man has a right to address his fellow man.

AN APPEAL FOR FAIR PLAY.

TO THE

Respectable and Orderly Inhabitants

OF

COLCHESTER.

GENTLEMEN,

Exercising the right which every Englishman is supposed to possess of addressing his fellow citizens, I came upon the platform at the Theatre on Tuesday night. A **Mob of Ruffians and Boys** (instigated by the acknowledged followers of **Sir Henry Storks**) refused me a hearing. An outrage upon the liberty of speech was thus committed, the shame of which cannot in any sense attach to me.

I appeared there from a stern sense of duty, and shall do so again.

The responsibility of maintaining order lies with you: your reputation (not mine) will suffer by a repetition of such proceedings.

If the supporters of Sir Henry Storks think they can intimidate me, it is because they are ignorant of my political antecedents; or they know that **their cause will not bear criticism**. An Election secured by violence and by ruffianism is only a momentary victory, the reaction from which is certain.

I have taken the **Theatre** for **THIS EVENING**, at **Eight o'clock**, and I ask a fair hearing from every man who has the feeling of an Englishman, whether Whig or Tory.

I am Gentlemen,

Yours obediently,

J. BAXTER-LANGLEY.

BACON, PRINTER, QUEEN STREET, COLCHESTER.

Figure 11: Colchester election poster, 1870 (Women's Library/Faw/Box/285/3HJW/F/01/1870).

Catcalls and hisses interrupted Langley, but one audience member at least was willing to allow him to speak and demanded the interrupter be turned out:

Langley: I don't want anybody turned out. I want everybody to hear and I want to be heard. If anybody creates a disturbance here, I would ask anyone near him to remonstrate with him as unreasonable, and

deaf to the claims of manly justice and courage, then only must he be turned out. I have no objections to any reasonable expression of hostile opinion.

Audience: Hear, hear.

Langley: If you do not agree with what I say I am perfectly willing that you show that you dissent from what I say, but if you are Englishmen, and if you are not cowards, you will hear me. I came among you with a reputation known to every working-man and friend of political literature. A man who says he doesn't know me I say he is ignorant of the reform history of this country.

At this point a member of the audience shouted 'Keep to your principle', and the resultant exchanges between speaker and audience give such an invaluable flavour of the antagonistic form of Victorian politics faced by Langley, that they are worth including in their entirety:

Langley: I will keep to my principles. It is because I do stick to my principles, and because I love my principles, above every other consideration of party, that I stand here tonight.

Audience: Who sent you?

Langley: If anyone ask who sent for me I say who sent for the apostles to Christianise the world in the early ages? Did the sinners send for them? No, they went from a sense of doing good. I came to represent that principle and utter a protest. If you ask me who sent for me I will tell you who sent me here . . .

Audience: Mrs Butler!

Langley: I came at the wish of a quarter of a million of the women of this country.

Audience: Where's Mrs Butler?, Go home again, and What about the workman's wives?

Langley: I come to represent a principle that is advocated by Florence Nightingale and some of the best women of this country.

Audience: No!

Langley: If you hoot me you hoot Harriet Martineau and Josephine Butler.

Audience: Where's Mrs Butler?, and, Three cheers for Learmonth!

Langley: I see respectable men here lend themselves to make senseless noises and it amazes me beyond measure; I can understand how boys do it, but sensible and respectable men doing it I cannot understand.

Audience: Laughter.

Langley: There's an Act of parliament in this country known as the Habeas Corpus act . . .

Audience: Where is Mrs Butler?

Langley: The Habeas Corpus Act has been one of the rallying points amongst the Liberals ever since I have known anything of politics. The Habeas Corpus Act is by the Contagious Diseases Acts literally suspended by the Admiralty and the War Office. Now I say if you are true and Advanced Liberals you will see with me at least so far.

Audience: Are you one?, and, What about the pet lambs?

Langley: I ask you for that which a respectable man might ask for—namely, that you should hear a man who differs from you. Now supposing this meeting . . .

Audience: What made you come this time?

Langley: I come here from a sense of duty—perhaps that is what you cannot understand who ask me the question.

Audience: Cheers and laughter

Langley: And I am quite sure that those who make that senseless noise . . .

Audience: uproar and laughter

Langley: . . . are persons who do not understand what duty means. (Laughter) The Acts which I speak of here and against which I have come solely to protest—(laughter)—are the only points of difference between Sir Henry Storks and myself.

Audience: Your pamphlet is disgusting!

Langley: And I have said over and over again that if Sir Henry Storks himself—[cheers]—and if he will look at the evidence as any reasonable man might be asked to do upon this question and open his mind fairly as a candid Englishman upon evidence that we can fairly lay before him—(No, no)—I believe that he would come to see this question from the same point of view that I do, and if he is not a candid man, I at once . . .

Audience: So he is!, and, Three cheers for Storks!

Langley: . . . now the Acts of which I speak are by the government figures a failure everywhere they have been . . .

Audience: No!

Langley: I have the evidence.

Audience: We don't want any more of it!

Langley: I say these Acts in every place they have been in operation, that is to say, wherever they have been long enough to be tested, have utterly failed in three respects. In the first place the government returns show that the applications of these Acts over a period of two or three years have done three things. (Uproar) They have produced three results, namely they have increased the number of prostitutes . . .

Audience: Not here! (cheers and hubbub.)

Langley: Wherever they have been three years in operation they have been found to produce three results—(Uproar)—now, if any gentleman disputes it I have the exact figures here. The districts of England based upon the government returns show what I say is true, that in every place where these Acts have been in operation for a sufficient length of time.

Audience: Rubbish!

Langley: If you Liberals say . . .

(Uproar.)

Langley: These are the official returns of the government sufficient to show that these Acts over a lengthened period . . .

(Uproar.)

Langley: Mr Duncan Maclaren has published a pamphlet exposing the government Bill—(Interruption)—Mr Maclaren has published an analysis of the government returns . . .

(Great uproar and continuous showers of peas, walnuts and apples upon the stage.)

At this point—and with the audience singing ‘Remember, remember the fifth of November!’—a paper bag full of flour struck Langley, sending white powder streaming over his black coat and waistcoat and he was forced to vacate the stage.¹⁰² Josephine Butler recalled Langley and Stuart returning to the hotel as ‘very pitiful objects, covered in mud, flour and other more unpleasant things, their clothes torn but their courage not in the least diminished’.¹⁰³

When Butler went to address a women’s meeting shortly afterwards, she met a similar reception. Despite leaving the hotel in disguise, having twenty-four bodyguards (including one particularly brave individual who deliberately dressed as Langley to draw away the ire of the waiting crowd), and a number of policemen being in attendance, she had to be hurriedly sneaked inside the venue and her speech was constantly interrupted by cries of ‘She’s still in the

hall!', 'Bring her out!' and even 'Let's set it on fire!'.¹⁰⁴ Surrounded and thus unable to leave she was similarly forced to exit via a rear window and hide in a nearby warehouse. She shortly afterwards left Colchester and returned to Liverpool.¹⁰⁵ The Conservative election meeting was, by contrast, well attended and 'The most sanguine supporter of the Conservative cause could hardly have wished for a more successful gathering'.¹⁰⁶

On the morning of Wednesday, 2 November 1870, barely hours before the final nomination, Langley addressed supporters to announce his retirement from the contest:

The principle I was called upon to vindicate was the Equality before the law of every English subject—the Highest or Lowest, the Meanest as well as the Best, be they Man *or Woman*. That principle has been the Shibboleth of Liberalism, and finds its expression in the Habeas Corpus act, trial by Jury and the whole of our criminal code . . . I deny any man is a Liberal who will sanction or promote such invasions on the liberties of the subject. For this reason as a Constant Liberal I opposed Sir Henry Storks and appeal to all conscientious lovers of popular rights to refuse him their support . . . I have done my duty. I leave you to do yours.¹⁰⁷

When Storks took the stage, it was evident that Langley's campaign had been successful. The votes were tallied with Learmonth receiving 1,363 votes; Storks receiving only 853 votes; giving the Tory a clear majority of 510.¹⁰⁸

Despite the hostile reception that he had endured Langley's campaign represented a great success for the repealers and a warning to the Acts' supporters everywhere. Storks's defeat resulted in candidates of both parties refusing to support the Acts openly for fear of similar intervention. On 17 November 1870, for instance, the *Morning Post* reported on the by-election in Newport and of a rumour that Langley would again become involved. Both candidates quickly asserted their desire that the Contagious Diseases legislation be repealed.¹⁰⁹ It was the first of many such events. By 1874 repealers could boast:

Greenwich, Dundee, Dover, and Renfrewshire have recently returned members who will vote for the Repeal of these Acts. Moreover the *Defeated* candidates at Dover and Renfrewshire were in favour of Repeal. Both in Dundee and Greenwich the second man at the poll was a repealer, while the *third* place in each instance

was occupied by a candidate who was favourable or indifferent to this hateful system.¹¹⁰

It would take another decade before repeal ended this abuse of women's rights.

In terms of Langley's own political ambitions, his actions were remarkable for their selfless, even self-defeating, nature. Before his involvement in Colchester Langley could realistically have expected Gladstone's support for his Greenwich candidature (see Chapter 9). By defeating the Prime Minister's favoured candidate and losing the Liberals a much-needed seat, the goodwill that he had worked hard to obtain had surely been lost. Liberal newspapers across the country reacted to the loss with fury; the *Leeds Mercury* deplored Langley's 'mischievous and gratuitous' interference that had 'turned a doubtful victory into a certain defeat'.¹¹¹ The *Bristol Mercury* similarly declared him 'a mischievous windbag'.¹¹² Even amongst his fellow opponents of the Contagious Diseases Acts there was little appreciation. Josephine Butler described the Colchester election as a turning point for the movement, but she viewed it as a divine rather than political victory. 'Those who had abstained from voting were,' she observed, 'for the most part the moral and religious part of the constituency' and it was when the local women 'went to their chapels to pray that Sir Henry Storks might never represent their city I felt victory was ours'.¹¹³ In fact, although she was later to suggest 'a small subscription' to assist him, Butler viewed radicals such as Langley with suspicion.¹¹⁴ Her husband was likewise dismissive of Langley's contributions, complaining that 'Repeal has been taken up too much as a political and too little as a Moral and Religious question'.¹¹⁵

Notes

- 1 Josephine Butler, *Letter [Dictated] from Winchester to Miss Priestman*. 10 October 1888, Women's Library/Faw/3JBL/127/132.
- 2 *Medical and Surgical History of the British Army which served in Turkey and the Crimea during the war against Russia in the years 1854–55–56. Military Medical History of Individual Corps. Coldstream Guards*. House of Commons Papers online [2434].
- 3 Parliamentary Papers, 1877 (360) Navy (Contagious Diseases). *Returns showing the Number of Cases of Venereal Diseases in Her Majesty's Ships and Vessels stationed at Five Home Ports, at which the Contagious Diseases Acts have been and are in operation, and the Number of Cases in Her Majesty's Ships and Vessels at Five Home Ports at which the Contagious Diseases Acts have never been applied, from the Year 1860 to the Year 1875, inclusive; together with the ratios per thousand of force for each year at each port, and the total ratios for the ports under the Acts, and the ports not under the Acts*.

- 4 Berkley Hill, 'Statistical Results of the Contagious Diseases Acts', *Journal of the Statistical Society of London*, vol. 33, no. 4. December 1870, p. 469; Alan Ramsey Skelley, *The Victorian Army at Home: Recruitment and Terms and Conditions of the British Regular, 1859–1899* (London: Croom Helm, 1977) p. 54.
- 5 J. Baxter Langley, *The Application of the Contagious Diseases Acts to Southampton: Mr Baxter Langley's Address* (Southampton: Southampton Times Steam Printing Works, 1870) p. 7.
- 6 Parliamentary Papers, 1867–68 (4031), XXXVII, p. xxix. cited in Judith R. Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980) p. 77.
- 7 *Contagious Diseases. A Bill (29 and 30 Victoria C96) [As Amended by the Select Committee] for the prevention of contagious diseases at certain naval and military bases, PP. (Bills)*, vol. 1.481 (1864), pp. 6–7; Great Britain Parliamentary Papers (Commons), vol. 19 (1871). 'Report of Royal Commission Appointed to Inquire into the Administration and Operation of the Contagious Diseases Acts', p. 3.
- 8 L.A. Hall, 'The Cinderella of Medicine: Sexually-Transmitted Diseases in Britain in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries', *British Journal of Genitourinary Medicine*, vol. 4, no. 69, August 1993, pp. 314–19.
- 9 *Report of Messrs Shaen and Roscoe upon the working of the Contagious Diseases Acts at Canterbury* (Unpublished Report, n.d.), pp. 7–8.
- 10 J. Baxter Langley, Letter from J. Baxter Langley to Consul Thomas Haines Dudley, 13 July 1865, DU2545.
- 11 The degree of concern expressed is shown by the coverage that it received in the magazine of the Anti-Contagious Diseases Acts, *The Shield*. The issue of 11 July 1870, for instance, carried reports from both 'Intelligence from the Subjugated Districts—Deptford' and 'The Practical Workings of the Acts'—Greenwich', pp. 155–56.
- 12 Roderick Moore, 'Josephine Butler (1828–1906): Feminist, Christian And Libertarian', *Libertarian Heritage*, no. 10, 1993, p. 2.
- 13 *Ibid.*
- 14 Benjamin Scott, *A State Iniquity: Its Rise; Extension and Overthrow. A Concise History of the System of State Regulated and Licensed Vice* (London: Kegan Paul, 1890) pp. 116–17.
- 15 'The Venereal Committee of the Harveian Society', *Lancet*, 16 March 1867, p. 347; 'The Contagious Diseases Act', *British Medical Journal*, 16 November 1867, p. 457; William Sloggett, 'History and Operations', cited in Walkowitz, *Prostitution*, p. 78
- 16 'The Venereal Committee of the Harveian Society', *Lancet*, 16 March 1867, p. 347.
- 17 Langley, *Southampton*, p. 4.
- 18 Moore, 'Josephine Butler', p. 3

- 19 Parliament—Exclusion of the Reporters—Observations, House of Commons Debate, 30 May 1870, vol. 201, cc1640–9.
- 20 ‘House of Commons Yesterday’, *The Times*, 21 July 1870.
- 21 Walkowitz, *Prostitution*, pp. 166–67; ‘Parliamentary Petitions’, *Hampshire Advertiser*, 23 July 1870. For details of the Kell’s remarkable lives, see also J.D. (Joanna Dunkin), *Memorials of the Rev. Edmund Kell and Mrs Kell, of Southampton* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1875). Some 3,000 to 4,000 women were later to sign a petition in opposition to the Acts prepared by the Reverend Edmund and Mrs Elizabeth Kell.
- 22 Mary Spongberg, *Feminizing Venereal Disease: The Body of the Prostitute in Nineteenth Century Medical Discourse* (New York: New York University Press, 1965) p. 63.
- 23 Langley, *Southampton*, p. 4.
- 24 *Ibid.*
- 25 Skelley, *Victorian Army*, p. 30.
- 26 Langley, *Southampton*, p. 5.
- 27 ‘One Who Was Present’, ‘The Lecture on the Contagious Diseases Act’, *Hampshire Advertiser*, 2 April 1870; J. Baxter Langley, ‘To the Editor of the *Hampshire Advertiser*’, *Hampshire Advertiser*, 9 April 1870; ‘One Who Was Present’, ‘Mr. Baxter Langley and The Contagious Diseases Act’, *Hampshire Advertiser*, 16 April 1870; J. Baxter Langley, ‘The Contagious Diseases Acts’, *Hampshire Advertiser*, 23 April 1870.
- 28 Langley, *Southampton*, p. 5.
- 29 J. Baxter Langley, *Southampton*, pp. 6–7. William Tait, for example, in his seminal work *Magdalenism: an inquiry into the extent, causes, and consequences of prostitution in Edinburgh* (2nd edn) (Edinburgh: P. Rickard, 1842) pp. 71–72, clearly expressed his belief in such predatory women: ‘The least inlet afforded is soon taken advantage of; and they are so much accustomed to the art of decoying the unwary, by wiles and threats together, that they are sure ultimately to attain their object.’
- 30 Langley, *Southampton*, p. 6.
- 31 *Ibid.*
- 32 *Ibid.*
- 33 *Ibid.*, pp. 5–6.
- 34 ‘One Who Was Present’, ‘The Lecture on the Contagious Diseases Act’, *Hampshire Advertiser*, 2 April 1870.
- 35 *Ibid.*
- 36 ‘One Who Was Present’, ‘Mr. Baxter Langley and The Contagious Diseases Act’, *Hampshire Advertiser*, 16 April 1870.
- 37 J. Baxter Langley, ‘To the Editor of the *Hampshire Advertiser*’, *Hampshire Advertiser*, 9 April 1870.
- 38 ‘One Who Was Present’, ‘The Lecture on the Contagious Diseases Act’, *Hampshire Advertiser*, 2 April 1870; ‘One Who Was Present’, ‘Mr. Baxter Langley and The Contagious Diseases Act’, *Hampshire Advertiser*, 16 April 1870.

- 39 'One Who Was Present', 'Mr. Baxter Langley and The Contagious Diseases Act', *Hampshire Advertiser*, 16 April 1870.
- 40 At this time 'gay' was a euphemism for prostitution.
- 41 One Who Was Present, 'Mr. Baxter Langley and the Contagious Diseases Act', *Hampshire Advertiser*, 16 April 1870.
- 42 'The Contagious Diseases Acts—Meeting at Southampton', *Hampshire Advertiser*, 27 April 1870.
- 43 Joseph Stebbing, 'The Contagious Diseases Acts—Meeting at Southampton', *Hampshire Advertiser*, 27 April 1870.
- 44 James Daley, 'George Stebbing (1775–1847) and Joseph Rankin Stebbing (1809–1874): Two Lives Examined', *Journal of the Southampton Local History Forum*, no. 14, Winter 2008, p. 35.
- 45 'Southampton Town Council', *Hampshire Advertiser*, 16 April 1870.
- 46 J. Baxter Langley, 'The Contagious Diseases Acts—Meeting at Southampton', *Hampshire Advertiser*, 27 April 1870.
- 47 <www.southampton.gov.uk/Images/Southampton%20Mayors%20list_tcm46-199405.pdf> [accessed 18 May 2011]; List of Southampton Mayors, Southampton City Council Press, p. 21 <<http://dalyhistory.wordpress.com/2009/09/17/joseph-stebbing-mayor-of-southampton>> [accessed 18 May 2011]; Daley, 'Two lives examined', pp. 29–35. Those accompanying Stebbing were also highly influential men. Buchan and Le Feuvre were members of the Town Council, and Buchan's father was at the time of the meeting serving as Mayor and employed more than 150 men at his local decorating firm.
- 48 Walkowitz, *Prostitutes*, pp. 80–81.
- 49 J. Baxter Langley, 'Annals of the Poor—The Contagious Diseases Acts', *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, 22 May 1870. The claim that respectable women were in danger from the overzealous or vindictive policeman was to be vehemently denied by supporters of the Acts and just as vigorously avowed to by opponents.
- 50 William Sloggett, 'History and Operations of the Contagious Diseases Acts in the Home Ports,' P.R.O., Adm. 1/6418, 1 April 1873.
- 51 Walkowitz, *Prostitution*, pp. 217–24. During the 1860s, more than three-quarters of the facility's income had derived from the Admiralty. Woolcombe himself was a personal beneficiary of this funding. Between 1869 and 1871 the Royal Albert was able to invest surplus funds of £1,300 in South Devon Railway debentures. Thomas Woolcombe was also the South Devon Railway's Chairman.
- 52 Berkley Hill to the Editor of the *Western Daily Press*, 16 March 1870, 'Correspondence Relating to an Alleged Instance of Tyrannous Administration of the Acts', cited in Tod E. Jones (ed.), *F.W. Newman and the Ethics of Reporting Anonymous Allegations*, p. 3 <www.fwnewman.org/Library/Letters/From/MTG_8-30-70.pdf> [accessed on 18 February 2012].
- 53 Jones, *F.W. Newman*, pp. 1–3.

- 54 Thomas Woollcombe, P.R.O., Adm. 1/6122, 16 January 1869, cited in Walkowitz, *Prostitution*, p. 220. In 1869, Woollcombe wrote in praise of the Lock Wards of the Royal Albert, 'By the most extraordinary exertions on the part of Inspector Anniss we now have got all our beds full'. Judith R. and Daniel Walkowitz, 'We Are Not Beasts of the Field: Prostitution and the Poor in Southampton and Plymouth', *Feminist Studies*, vol. 1, no. 3/4, Winter–Spring, 1973, p. 95.
- 55 Walkowitz, 'We Are Not Beasts of the Field', *Feminist Studies*, p. 95.
- 56 Ibid.
- 57 Christopher Forester, 'Silas Rendle Anniss 1831–1914' <www.drewry.net/TreeMill/indil176.html> [accessed 18 February 2012].
- 58 'Thomas Woollcombe to the Editor of the *Western Daily Mercury*, May 12, 1870', cited in 'Plymouth—Veracity of the Spies', *The Shield*, 13 June 1870, p. 123.
- 59 Ibid.
- 60 'Her Father to the Editor of the *Western Daily Mercury*', cited in 'Plymouth—Veracity of the Spies', *The Shield*, 13 June 1870, p. 123.
- 61 Ibid.
- 62 'Intelligence from the Subjected Districts—Plymouth', *The Shield*, 1 July 1870, p. 543; 'The Police and Prostitution', *Reynold's Newspaper*, 9 July 1871.
- 63 'Plymouth and Devonport—A Lame Defence', *The Shield*, 27 June 1870, p. 139.
- 64 Ibid.
- 65 'Dudley', *The Shield*, 18 July 1870, p. 169.
- 66 'Plymouth and Devonport—An Instructive Investigation', *The Shield*, 4 June 1870, p. 147.
- 67 More properly known as *Distasteful and Derogatory?; Report of the Committee Appointed to Enquire into the Pathology and Treatment of the Venereal Diseases, with the View to Diminish its Injurious Effects on the Men of the Army and Navy, P.P. 1867–68*; Phillip Howell, 'Prostitution and Racialised Sexuality: The Regulation of Prostitution in Britain and the British Empire Before the Contagious Diseases Acts', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, vol. 18, 2000, p. 322.
- 68 Speech of Dr Lyon Playfair, Parliamentary Business, 24 May 1870, 'Strangers Ordered to Withdraw' <
- 69 William Ewart Gladstone to Sir George Grey, 29 March 1870, cited in Henry Colin Gray Matthew (ed.), *The Gladstone Diaries*, vol. 7 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982) p. 267.
- 70 Sir Henry Storks, 'Lt. General Sir Henry Storks K.C.B. to Mr. Skey, Chairman of the Commission', *Report of the Committee Appointed to Enquire into the Pathology and Treatment of Venereal Disease With a View to Diminish its Injurious Effects on the Men of the Army and Navy With Appendices and the Evidence Given Before the Committee* (London: Harrison & Sons, 1867) p. xlv.

- 71 'The Election at Newark—Discomfiture of Sir Henry Storks', *The Shield*, 4 April 1870, p. 42; Glen Petrie, *A Singular Iniquity: The Campaigns of Josephine Butler* (London: Macmillan, 1971) p. 99. Close investigation of Storks' claims found some discrepancies. Whilst the prevalence of syphilis had indeed greatly diminished, the incidence of gonorrhoea had remained unchanged. It was also discovered that the figures that Storks had employed, probably innocently, included reference to a detachment that was only on the island for two days.
- 72 'The Election at Newark—The Discomfiture of Sir Henry Storks', *The Shield*, 4 April 1870, p. 42.
- 73 Petrie, *Iniquity*, p. 100. Joseph Arch was to go on to lead the National Agricultural Labourers' Union and himself become the Member of Parliament for North West Norfolk in 1885.
- 74 'Newark Election', *Bradford Observer*, 1 April 1870.
- 75 'Occasional Notes', *Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle*, 26 October 1870; 'Summary of News', *Sheffield and Rotherham Independent*, 26 October 1870.
- 76 'To the Electors of the Borough of Colchester', *Ipswich and Colchester Times*, 28 October 1870.
- 77 J. Baxter Langley, 'Colchester Election—The following Letter was Addressed to Sir H. Storks', Election Leaflet, October 1870; J. Baxter Langley to Sir Henry Storks, 24 October 1870, 'Colchester Election', *The Shield*, 29 October 1870, pp. 274–75.
- 78 Sir Henry Storks, Letter to J. Baxter Langley, 24 October 1870, *The Shield*, 29 October 1870, p. 275.
- 79 J. Baxter Langley, Letter to Sir Henry Storks, 24 October 1870, 'Colchester Election', *The Shield*, 29 October 1870, pp. 274–75. Emphasis in original.
- 80 Ibid.
- 81 J. Baxter Langley, Letter to Sir Henry Storks, 24 October 1870, 'Colchester Election', *The Shield*, 29 October 1870, pp. 274–75.
- 82 *The Shield*, 29 October 1870, pp. 274–75.
- 83 'News of the Week', *Bristol Mercury*, 29 October 1870; 'News of the Day', *Birmingham Daily Post*, 26 October 1870; 'D.P.', 'News of the Day', *Birmingham Daily Post*, 26 October 1870.
- 84 Sir Henry Storks, 'Colchester Election', *Morning Post*, 3 November 1870. This bill had been passed after pressure from the National Education League, which had itself evolved from the Birmingham Education League, founded in 1867 by George Dixon MP. Langley had been a member of the former organisation since November 1869.
- 85 The Irish Church Act of 1869 disestablished the church in Ireland, dissociating it from the state. This ended the unpopular system of tithes that the Irish Church garnered from a population only a minority of whom owed it their religious allegiance.

- 86 'Gravesend—Meeting of Women', *The Shield*, 18 July 1870. The need for 'a large standing army and a proportionally large army of prostitutes to minister to them' had always been a point of contention within the movement. In 1870 Langley had reported for the *Herald for Peace* 'How completely the agitation against the C. D. Acts is taking the form of an anti-military movement. Wherever I go my Peace arguments are universally cheered . . . there is this healthy sentiment amongst working class men and middle-class politicians.'
- 87 Major General George Hart, *Hart's Annual Army List* (London: John Murray Publishers, 1876) p. 148. Lt Colonel Learmonth served with the 17th Lancers, more commonly known as the Light Brigade, during the Eastern campaign of 1854–55 where he was awarded the Medal with Clasp for Sebastopol, 5th Class of the Medjidie, and Turkish Medal. He also served in the Indian campaign of 1857–58.
- 88 'Colchester Election—The Nomination', *Essex Standard and General Advertiser*, 4 November 1870; Colonel Learmonth, 'To the Burgesses and Electors of Colchester', *Essex Standard and General Advertiser for the Eastern Counties*, 28 October 1870; 'Colchester Election', *Morning Post*, 3 November 1870.
- 89 Colonel Learmonth, 'Colchester Election—The Nomination', *Essex Standard and General Advertiser for the Eastern Counties*, 4 November 1870.
- 90 'Dockyard Co-operation Meeting on Plumstead Common', *Greenwich and Deptford Chronicle*, 24 July 1869; 'The Deptford Co-operative Movement', *Greenwich and Deptford Chronicle*, 24 July 1869; 'The Deptford Co-operative Movement', *Greenwich and Deptford Chronicle*, 31 July 1869; 'The Deptford Co-operative Movement', *Greenwich and Deptford Chronicle*, 14 August 1869; 'The Deptford Co-operative Movement', *Greenwich and Deptford Chronicle*, 21 August 1869; 'Deptford Co-operative Shipbuilding and Repairing Society', *Greenwich and Deptford Chronicle*, 2 October 1869.
- 91 M. Trustram, *Women of the Regiment: Marriage and the Victorian Army* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) p. 39.
- 92 Colonel Learmonth, 'Colchester Election—The Nomination', *Essex Standard and General Advertiser for the Eastern Counties*, 4 November 1870.
- 93 'Mr. J. Baxter Langley at the Theatre', *Essex Standard and General Advertiser for the Eastern Counties*, 28 October 1870.
- 94 'Occasional Notes', *Sheffield and Rotherham Independent*, 26 October 1870.
- 95 Ibid.
- 96 *1870 Colchester Election Poster*, Women's Library/ Faw/Box/285/3HJW/F/01.
- 97 Harriet Martineau, 'To the Women of Colchester', *Harriet Martineau's Autobiography* (London: James R. Osgood and Company, 1877) pp. 433–34; 'Suggested for Pulpit Notice', Election poster, 1870, Faw/Box285/3HJW/F/01/990; *To the Christian Electors of Colchester*, Election Leaflet, 1870, Faw/Box285/3HJW/F/01/991.
- 98 *To the Christian Electors of Colchester*, Election Leaflet, 1870, Faw/Box285/3HJW/F/01/991.

- 99 Josephine Butler, *Personal Reminiscences of a Great Crusade* (London: Horace Marshall and Sons, 1896) p. 44.
- 100 'Mr. J. Baxter Langley at the Theatre', *Essex Standard and General Advertiser for the Eastern Counties*, 28 October 1870.
- 101 *Ibid.*
- 102 *Colchester Chronicle*, 4 November 1870.
- 103 Josephine Butler, *Josephine E. Butler: An Autobiographical Memoir* (Bristol: J.W. Arrowsmith, 1909) pp. 102–03.
- 104 Butler, *An Autobiographical Memoir*, pp. 102–03; Butler, Extracts from Private Letter, 5 November 1870.
- 105 Pietre, *Iniquity*, pp. 102–04; Butler, *Autobiographical Memoir*, pp. 106–07.
- 106 'Colchester Election', *Essex Standard and General Advertiser*, 28 October 1870.
- 107 J. Baxter Langley, *A Farewell Address to the Free Burgesses and Electors But More Especially the Liberal Voters of the Borough of Colchester*, November 1870, Women's Library, 3HJW/F/01/BoxFL285.
- 108 'Colchester Election—Special Telegram', *Freeman's Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser*, 4 November 1870.
- 109 'The Representation of Newport', *Morning Post*, 17 November 1870.
- 110 *Second Annual Report of the Northern Counties League for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts For the Year Ending August 31st 1874* (Sheffield, D.T. Ingham Printers, 1874) p. 21, Women's Library/Faw/343.545/06.
- 111 'Defeat of Sir Henry Storks', *Leeds Mercury*, 4 November 1870.
- 112 'News of the Week', *Bristol Mercury*, 5 November 1870.
- 113 Josephine Butler, Letter to Wilson, 5 November 1870.
- 114 Butler, *Letter to Miss Priestmnan*, 19 September 1872, Faw/3JBL/06/07. Butler had met Langley's associate from the National Reform League, Professor Beesley, at a meeting of agricultural labourers in Newark. She had not liked him.
- 115 Reverend George Butler, Letter to Mrs Wilson, 24 December 1872, Faw/JBL/06/39.

Nurturing the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants, 1872–1873

On 28 January 1872, Langley chaired a meeting of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants (ASRS) at the Montpelier Arms, Walworth. It was one of the earliest gatherings of the Society, which had been officially formed only two months before.¹ Although the attendance and chairmanship of such meetings was a regular occupation for Langley, this meeting was to prove different. Within six weeks he was Acting President of the Executive Council in what was to be his first, and only, involvement in the trade union movement. His willingness to compromise and skill in diplomatic negotiation, as much as his oratory and political experience, were to prove vital to the survival of the union.

Langley's participation in the formation of the ASRS seems at first incongruous. He had on previous occasions stated his belief that the strikes and demands for wage increases made by trade unions inevitably worked against the best interests of the working classes. Unions, he believed, operated upon the misconception that wages were controlled by employers and could be increased by strike action. On 18 August 1859, for example, the *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*—a paper on which Langley was employed—said of the London builders' strike:

no error has produced more painful consequences than that which is current among the industrial population, that masters capriciously, or by combination can reduce permanently, the rates of wages.²

The paper continued on this theme the following week, explaining:

To suppose the rate of wages dependent upon the charity of those who pay them is a degradation to the man, for it supposes that more is paid for his work than his work is worth; on the other hand,

to impute a fall of wages to the avarice of masters is as absurd as it is unjust. It is absurd, because a permanent reduction of wages is beyond the power of masters to bring about, for the simple reasons that, supposing labour to be cheapened below the natural point fixed by the law of supply and demand, new capitalists would come into the market to compete for the profits resulting from the cheapened labour; the workman then would once again be in demand, and his remuneration would be restored by a natural process.³

This belief in the ‘inexorable law of supply and demand’ led to reformers such as Langley being viewed with suspicion by unionists.⁴ His attempts to establish the Provident Society, for instance, had been met with a hostile response by the Miners’ Union, which described his organisation as ‘a master’s trick to divert the minds of the men from the Union’.⁵ But while strike action and wage demands were—in Langley’s opinion—self-defeating, he was well aware of the exploitation of working men and women through long hours, insecure employment and unsafe working conditions. Langley had witnessed the Burradon mining disaster personally and through his writing in the *Newcastle Daily Chronicle* had exposed the appalling housing that the community endured. He had experienced first-hand the self-serving means by which a combination of employers had seized control of the distribution of compensation (see Chapter 3). Perhaps due to this fact, barely two months after the death of the Burradon miners, the *Chronicle* reported another industrial dispute with a far more sympathetic report and with the inflammatory headline ‘The Slaves of the Bleach Works’:⁶

We are told that the hours of labour in these works were often seventy, eighty, and even over one hundred hours per week, and that while they were thus terribly protracted, the temperature of the works was such as to produce the most serious results upon the workers.⁷

The article had ended with the uncompromising statement:

The condition of the American slave is not one whit worse—in several states it is perhaps many degrees better—than the condition of these English women and children.⁸

For a man such as Langley, who had supported the Ten Hours movement since his first foray into political campaigning, the treatment of employees by the

railway companies, and the working conditions that they imposed, were not just immoral but criminal. In 1872, for example, 130 railwaymen were reported killed in shunting accidents alone. Company claims that these deaths were due to human error were rendered absurd by the testimony of the men themselves about their overwork:

I myself am a signal man, and have been in the employ of the London, Chatham, and Dover Company for eleven years next June, during which time I have averaged eighty-four hours a week. As there are only *two* of us, we relieve each other on Sunday morning at 8.30 a.m. to enable us to change over from night to day. We remain on duty till 7.30 the following morning so as to enable one of us to have 23 hrs. off duty once a fortnight.⁹

The rules of the Great Western were more explicit still:

Every man must devote himself exclusively to the Company's service, attending at such hours as may be appointed, and residing wherever he may be required.¹⁰

Although never employed in the railway industry Langley possessed an extensive knowledge of the companies and their methods. In 1863 he had published a pamphlet entitled *The Illustrated Official Guide and Tourist's Handbook to the North Eastern Railway and its Branches* that detailed the history and origins of both this and other British railway companies.¹¹ More significantly, *The Dangers of The North British Railway Policy*, which Langley had published in 1861, was devoted to a series of exposés of the dishonest and manipulative practices that several of the major railway companies employed. A recent contract to run trains between Manchester and London, for example, had been awarded to two companies, the Great Northern and the Manchester, Sheffield and Lincoln Railway. The competition between the two businesses, it had been claimed, would ensure lower ticket costs for the traveller. Instead, the two railway companies had combined to raise prices simultaneously. Langley had levelled further criticism at the North British Railway which, seeking to protect its monopoly of the Edinburgh-to-London line, had undercut its rivals and 'sacrificed every other consideration to that of the dividend'. Langley compared the expenditure of the North British with that of the rival North Eastern and linked lack of investment with increased accidents. This pamphlet displayed a deep knowledge

not only of working conditions but also of the unstated dangers and benefits of managerial policy and, perhaps more importantly for the union men, a scepticism and distrust of directors.¹² The work-practices that he exposed in this pamphlet and the concomitant—and avoidable—death rate amongst railway employees, were sufficient incentive for participation in the new organisation.

The 1872 Montpelier meeting resulted in several proposals being passed by the London Railwaymen: the first resulted from a member of the audience asking whether the union intended to seek official recognition, claiming ‘if that was done then hundreds would join it as funds would then be safe’.¹³ As a result of this question it was resolved that a set of rules—to be based on those of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers—should be submitted to the Registrar of Friendly Societies at the first opportunity and the Society should then register under the Trades Union Act.¹⁴ The meeting greeted this decision with ‘warm approval’.¹⁵

Several appointments were also made. George Chapman, who was present as a speaker, was voted the union’s Acting General Secretary. Although employed at the Woolwich Arsenal, Chapman had previously been active with the South East London signalmen during the 1855–56 campaigns for railway unionisation.¹⁶ In 1871 London Railway workers had again attempted to organise. Using small, 4-inch by 2-inch, handbills to advertise their presence, they coordinated a series of gatherings and on 3 December 1871, announced their intention of launching the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants. George Chapman had been amongst the most active of these men and so was a natural choice for this role.¹⁷

The second appointment was that of Charles Basset Vincent, an experienced journalist and activist based in Derby (who was not in attendance), as Acting Union President. Like Chapman, Vincent had a history of railway unionism. He had been active in an earlier combination, *The Railway Working Man’s Provident Benefit Society*, and as a result had been blacklisted. Reduced to a state of near destitution he had been approached with an offer of work by Liberal MP Thomas Bass (1799–1884).¹⁸

Bass had become a vocal spokesperson for the railway employees after a series of horrendous accidents in 1870.¹⁹ Eighteen people had been killed in a collision in Newark in June; two weeks later a second collision in Carlisle killed six; in November a Liverpool express ran into a coal train killing seven; and December saw a mid-journey train separation resulting in fourteen casualties.²⁰ Bass’s constituency of Derby contained a large percentage of railway workers some of whom had approached the MP seeking

assistance. Bass's opinions held particular authority as he was not only a Member of Parliament but, as a brewer, also a major railway shareholder and customer.²¹ Bass raised the men's concerns at a Midland Railway shareholders' meeting, reporting cases of men being on their engines '17, 18, and 19 hours without intermission'. The company's manager met these accusations dismissively, declaring that workers on his railway 'had nothing whatever to complain of'.²²

In order to verify the claims of his constituents, Bass had hired Vincent who, working alongside journalist James Greenwood, had systematically collected details of appalling work hours and conditions. Published in *The Times* these articles—and similar editorials in papers as diverse as *The Daily Telegraph* and the *Lancet*—swung public opinion in favour of reform.²³ A series of rancorous exchanges in *The Times* further increased public awareness.²⁴ On 15 March 1871 Bass brought up the matter in Parliament during discussion of the Railway Companies Bill. Thanks to Vincent and Greenwood's investigative work, he was able to produce company records including one showing a driver had worked continuously for 29.5 hours. Knowledge of the poor conditions that the men worked under were by now so well known that the company Chairman, W.P. Price's claim that 'there was not the shadow of foundation' to the charges was met with laughter.²⁵ Rephrasing his answer, Price, stated that

he did not mean to say that engine-drivers might not have been on the engines for 30 hours; but these were exceptional cases . . . and not cases that might be introduced against the Midland Railway Company as the foundation of a general charge.²⁶

These victories, combined with the passing of Gladstone's more tolerant 1871 trade union legislation, and the resurgence of the Ten-Hour Movement, led to fresh attempts to found a trade union in Leeds, Manchester, Bolton and other provincial areas, as well as in the capital.²⁷ Originally, Bass had been requested to accept the position of Union President, but—when he had declined—Vincent had been nominated.²⁸

Langley, as a respectable surgeon, businessman and parliamentary candidate with a history of commitment to radical causes, was viewed by the London men as a great asset and six weeks after attending the Montpellier meeting he was offered the Presidency of the Executive Council. In his retrospective history of the movement, G.W. Alcock described his impression of Langley as 'A dominating personality, eloquent in speech, resourceful and far-seeing' and

claimed his decision to join the movement meant that 'London was swept up in a whirlwind'.²⁹ As Acting Executive President Langley's primary role was to coordinate a meeting between London-based and provincial delegates 'to prepare for the appeal to the suffrages of the whole of the members' in the creation of a permanent and nationwide Executive.³⁰

Once nominated, Langley's wide-ranging campaigning narrowed to focus almost entirely upon the railway union. Meetings were held as far apart as Cardiff, Rochester and Strood, with Langley reportedly addressing as many as three meetings in a single evening:³¹

[he] counselled, inspired, cheered the despondent, instructed the ignorant, wrote out their resolutions, saw what wanted doing for the ASRS., and did it, gave it fervour, fire, eloquence, put it on its feet and kept it there.³²

In addition to company hostility, what made Langley's role especially difficult was the level of long-standing suspicion shown by the regional railway delegates towards their metropolitan brethren. The provincial railwaymen had announced their own intention of building a union and Manchester representatives had already adopted a set of rules.³³ They viewed with condescension the London men's invitation to abandon those rules and accept the authority of an acting executive they had not sanctioned and which bypassed their own efforts. Moreover, the term 'railwayman' was in itself a misnomer. By the 1870s there were more than 200 individual railway companies, each with its own conditions of employment, pay structure and procedures. Companies utilised this fragmentation, negotiating with each grade separately and encouraging employees to view each other as competitors for promotion rather than allies and fellow workers.³⁴ Such sectionalism, Langley knew, severely weakened the position of the railwaymen, especially as no such sectional rivalry existed amongst the railway companies, all of whom were quite willing to lend supposed rivals equipment and employees to negate the effect of any industrial action.³⁵

Adding to Langley's problems was the level of enmity that existed within the Executive itself. Both Vincent and Chapman harboured ambitions to become permanent General Secretary and both could boast strong, and partisan, bases of support.³⁶ Chapman's London origin meant that he held the advantage of access to the Executive. Vincent, situated in the provinces, was clearly in the weaker position but enjoyed the financial support of Thomas Bass, whilst the London-based Executive was near penniless. Langley sought

no personal aggrandisement and viewed the jealousy between the Acting General Secretary and Acting Union President with dismay. But of the two, it was Vincent's actions which were overtly self-serving and often to the detriment of the ASRS itself. In his attempts to undermine his rival, Vincent actively discouraged provincial members from trusting the London Executive. In his later—and highly self-serving—account of the union's foundation Vincent dismissed Chapman as 'a mechanic at Woolwich Arsenal, and entirely ignorant of railway work', whilst Langley—or 'the "doctor" for that is the title the Londoners were pleased to call him'—was similarly disregarded; he 'professed to take immense interest in the new society, and he too knew nothing of a practical nature connected to railways'. In short, Vincent objected to 'outsiders' being associated with a movement exclusively relating to railway servants.³⁷

For Langley—who was attempting to forge links between the disparate factions and doing so with barely any financial support—such disloyalty was intolerable. Vincent was failing to notify the executive of new branches, membership or finances and was advising provincial railwaymen that no payments should be made to London until a permanent Executive had been voted upon.³⁸ Langley's proposed date for the Great Delegate Meeting of 1 June, which was to have just such a purpose, had to be postponed due to this lack of funds.³⁹ Matters for Langley became more difficult still when Thomas Bass appointed Vincent as the editor of the *Railway Services Gazette*. Designed to support the fledgling movement, the first issue was printed on 3 February 1872.⁴⁰ As with the provincial meetings, Vincent, and his associates James Greenwood and Edwin Phillips, used the paper to belittle Langley and the London Executive and to promote his own contributions. On 1 June 1872, for instance, the *Gazette* reported on a Brick Lane meeting, during which a proposed delegate was quizzed as to his voting intentions.⁴¹ Upon stating that he remained unsure, a surprisingly eloquent observer took the stage to advocate that delegates:

Vote for Mr. C. B. Vincent for he is the first man who founded the Society, and he has done a vast amount of good already and should you elect him to the position of General Secretary you will then have a good captain to steer you through the troubled waters. He is a gentleman of ability, uprightness and honesty. What greater proof of it can you have than that he is in the employ of Mr. W. T. Bass Esq. M.P. who has done more for the poor oppressed railway labourer than any man in existence?⁴²



Figure 12: Charles Bassett Vincent (Alcock, *Fifty Years*, p. 96).

While promoting Vincent, the *Gazette* openly accused the metropolitan railwaymen of arrogance in establishing the society legally without provincial involvement; presumption in putting forward the London rather than Manchester rules; and artifice in establishing an Executive Committee without formal elections. It insinuated that rather than this being temporary, with Langley working to organise a ballot, the Executive was a permanent non-elected body.⁴³ In response, Langley contacted the noted trade unionist George Potter—whom he knew through their mutual involvement in electoral reform campaigns—and received a section in his newspaper the *Bee-Hive* through which he was able to refute the accusations:

The promptness of the men in the metropolis in putting the society on a legal basis, has created some jealousy in the provinces; a jealousy fostered and encouraged by certain people who charge the London men with a desire to elect a particular gentleman as General Secretary, whilst the men in the provinces seem equally anxious to thrust upon the London men another gentleman whose character and antecedents are not satisfactory to the London men.⁴⁴

Matters were not helped when Chapman, equally infuriated by the Acting Union President's actions, wrote a terse letter to Vincent and signed himself 'Faithfully and sincerely yours, George Chapman, *Secretary, ASRS*'.⁴⁵ Vincent bitterly recalled this. 'Mr. Chapman in his letter to me, announced himself as General Secretary, when really no General Secretary existed.'⁴⁶

Even as Langley attempted to reschedule formal elections the *Railway Services Gazette* thundered:

Who are the architects, and what are their plans? In other words, who are the officers of the Railway Servants' Society, that may grow to be one of the largest, if not the largest, in England and what are *their* plans? Are the said officers already elected? . . . it is not we who ask it; It is asked, we repeat, by hundreds of our correspondents living away from London, and who are evidently honest in their declaration that they were unaware of the election of the Society's superior officers, and request to know when and where the election took place, and by what percentage of the numerous bodies of railway servants the same were accepted and ratified.⁴⁷

It was overtly threatening and accused the Executive Council of deceit:

for their sake as well as that of the members, it would be well that the ballot test be adopted as speedily as is convenient. It would be an easily accessible and inexpensive test.⁴⁸

In fact, Vincent knew full well that organising a ballot was neither 'easily accessible' nor 'inexpensive'. The Society was in dire financial straits as provincial branches, following Vincent's counsel, refused to send contributions to London. A letter from Chapman to the Plumstead branch of the ASRS illustrates both the financial difficulties that the union faced and the suspicion that Vincent's constant accusations had inspired amongst the membership:

Dear Sir,—The money I asked you to send was not to support me, it was to purchase other materials for opening branches throughout the country. I have not received a fraction for my services. I have not asked for any money from the Council. I have paid money from my own purse to keep the Society going . . . Again I tell you I have not received a single penny for my services which commenced last August.⁴⁹

Such appeals often fell on deaf ears. John Graham was a vocal and dedicated unionist but remained a bitter opponent of the Executive and of Chapman in particular.⁵⁰ In 1872 he congratulated an associate for not paying the London office much-needed funds:

Dear friend,—I must congratulate you on your success in pumping Chapman. He has told me he gets nothing by being Secretary, but when I was in London one of the London men showed me a letter which stated that the money was required to pay for office furniture and for arrears of Secretary and Treasurer's salary so you see Chapman is a liar . . . this letter says he was assistant secretary to the *Amalgamated Engineers* for 17 or 18 years. Mr Bladen of Birmingham, writing to the Secretary of the *Amalgamated Engineers*, was informed in reply that they (the engineers) knew nothing of him.⁵¹

Resentment was also growing amongst the metropolitan men who saw their efforts derided by provincials who refused to contribute financially. Langley continued to preach rapprochement, telling audiences 'They must act as brothers, man to man and combine all branches of the service'.⁵² At London meetings in order to foster good relations he began reading aloud correspondence between himself and James Greenwood (who was now editor of the *Gazette*), Bladen of Birmingham, and other provincial spokesmen. He told them he 'relied on the good sense of the provincial delegates, who would be selected for their fitness to represent their fellows' and succeeded in convincing the London membership that a compromise with John Graham and the provincial branches was desirable.⁵³

While diffusing the London men's anger Langley was simultaneously attempting to smooth the concerns of the provincial members and travelled to address meetings in Manchester, Chester and Birmingham, whilst Chapman toured the Midlands.⁵⁴ Such efforts were not reciprocated. Vincent was simultaneously advising railwaymen in Barnsley, Huddersfield, Halifax, Wakefield and Doncaster that he did not acknowledge the Executive and that until a Delegate Conference was held no society of 'a definite shape with a settled name' existed.⁵⁵ The survival of the union itself became uncertain when Bass, appalled by the continued disagreements, threatened to remove both financial and parliamentary support.⁵⁶ On 26 March 1872, Langley, Chapman and Vincent, as well as delegates from Manchester, Derby, Birmingham and other provincial and metropolitan branches were invited to his home.⁵⁷ Also present

were the newly appointed vice presidents, Thomas Brassey, D. Straight, and Langley's old associate from the Reform League, Samuel Morley. All three men were by now Members of Parliament.⁵⁸ It was an intimidating environment. Not only was Langley facing men from the provinces convinced that he was a charlatan, but Bass himself, according to G.W. Alcock's *Fifty Years of Railway Trade Unionism*, disliked his 'Advanced Liberal' beliefs particularly his support for Irish home rule (which the Liberals did not support until thirteen years after the events described). Roland Kenny, writing in 1913, went further by suggesting that Bass viewed Langley as 'an upstart'.⁵⁹

The meeting did not start well. Both provincial and metropolitan attendees made uncompromising demands for their candidate. The delegate from Derby, John Graham, reported that his members 'expressed a determination to have Mr. Vincent as General Secretary' and that of Birmingham (Bladen) claimed 'four hundred men in that town were willing to join the Society, but they would not do so because Mr. Vincent was not the General Secretary'. A London man countered that the South-Eastern Line was 'to a man' in favour of Chapman.⁶⁰ Langley reassured both parties and, in answer to questions posed by Bass, detailed his ongoing efforts to arrange a ballot.⁶¹ He also noted:

In order to enrol members in a society it must first be legally established. Let the officers be appointed for the briefest of periods—*they must be appointed*—and the Society duly registered, or otherwise it could never have any real existence.⁶²

He also pointed out that, as a result of Vincent's instruction, many of those complaining were yet to become official members of the ASRS and as such they had no say in the matter.⁶³ Although far from ending the enmity between the two factions, Langley's diplomacy resulted in the meeting ending with 'cordial expressions of good will on all sides'.⁶⁴

Following this small success, a second meeting was arranged and on 9 April the Executive Council invited twelve provincial delegates to a conference at Bass's home. To further encourage an atmosphere of trust, it also published the following resolution:

That this Executive Council of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants, having heard the Chairman's report of the interview with Mr Bass, M.P., and with the Vice-Presidents, desire to express their deep regret at the dissensions now prevailing amongst the railway men, and publicly declare their desire to adopt any course

which may be calculated to consolidate the union of the railway *employés*. That this Council regards this union as of greater consequence than the claims of any men for office and repudiate any intention of setting aside or evading the deliberate decision of the men who are willing to join the society, either in the election of officers or the final settlement of the rules.⁶⁵

Once again, the *Railway Services Gazette* worked quickly to undermine Langley's efforts:

It is with unfeigned satisfaction that we announce that the slight misunderstanding . . . is in a fair way towards amicable adjustment . . . [But] We were unaware of the 'dissentions' amongst the men that move the Executive Council to such regret . . . The men—and we speak on the evidence of thousands of letters received from all parts of the country—have, with commendable patience, been enlisting members amongst themselves, waiting until news arrived from headquarters that the time had come when the delegates might assemble for the nomination of Chief Officers.⁶⁶

Even the reassurance that the Council 'have no intention of evading or setting aside the deliberate decision of the men' was condemned as provocation. The *Gazette* remarked that it was 'a mistake to talk so to men who are shrewdly capable of minding their own affairs' with the front-page editorial ending with the observation:

It would be idle now any longer to attempt to conceal the fact that an uneasy feeling for some time past has disturbed those who have been the most anxious and zealous, to promote the welfare of the institution in question.⁶⁷

The agenda of the second meeting was prepared carefully by Langley; he was determined that all potential causes of dissension should be circumvented. When greeting the provincial delegates, he assured them that the 'London men were willing to make any concessions to secure union with their friends in the provinces'.⁶⁸ As the Londoners outnumbered the provincials, he suggested that some leave so as to make the numbers even. Langley singled out John Graham, who had been a highly vocal critic of the Executive Council, as one 'whose good works

were known to them' and offered him the role of Chairman, without losing voting privileges. Graham declined, but the gesture was appreciated. Several clauses of the rules were then discussed, the most important being: 'the Council and Officers who have been elected (*pro tem*) shall be accepted as a provisional government until the delegate meeting shall have been duly constituted'. Again, Langley's diplomacy avoided possible disagreement by adding to the proposal 'That Mr. Graham, of Derby be appointed to receive the monies contributed for the purpose of the conference county districts . . . Mr. Graham to report to the Chairman of the E. C. in respect of such contributions'.⁶⁹

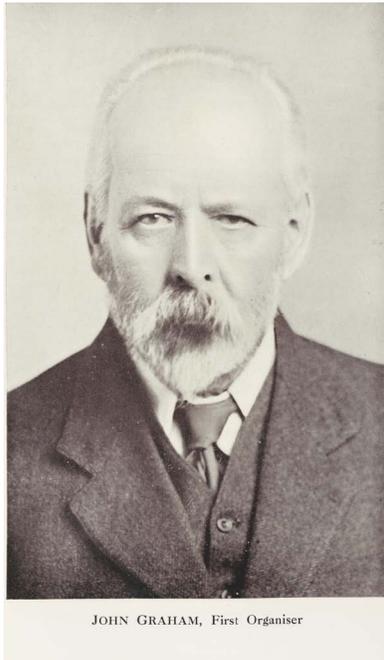


Figure 13: John Graham (Alcock, *Fifty Years*, p. 160).

By doing so Langley not only ensured that the movement would in the future receive the funding required for a delegates' conference but also—and perhaps more importantly—he also established a direct line of communication between himself and one of the provincial branches most trusted members. Although Graham retained misgivings in regard to Chapman, he had been impressed by the compromises proffered and reported to his members that 'All provincial delegates (twelve) were satisfied and there is now no division between us.' Before they parted, 24 June was set for the delegate conference with all branches striving to send a representative. As proof of Langley's skill

as a negotiator, Graham also added that 'Dr Baxter Langley was in the Chair and were it not for him I am afraid we should not have parted as we did'.⁷⁰

The change in atmosphere was immediately apparent. At a meeting of London members the following May, Langley was able to read fraternal letters from Graham to the metropolitan audience. These were 'cordially received', and a vote of confidence in Graham was adopted.⁷¹ Although distrust of the *Gazette* remained, a proposal to request that Bass demand the editor's resignation was rejected. Langley advised 'a policy of peace' and believed that as he had written to the paper advising it that a date for the delegate meeting and ballot had been set this 'would put an end to further misimpressions'.⁷² Instead the *Gazette* failed to publish the letter and claimed that it had never been received. It accused Langley of 'hallucination', insinuated drunkenness by describing him as 'a public professor of those glorious principles that have won for the Hole-in-the-Wall a renown second to no other pot house in England' and belittled his work for the union by suggesting he was 'a gentleman whose self-sacrificial spirit already had induced him to pledge his entire and undivided support to at least a half a dozen causes'.⁷³ It finished with a report of Langley's speech at the Montpelier Arms, claiming:

It is no fault of ours that Baxter Langley, Esq. LL.D. inclines to language not commonly heard away from Seven Dials, or those select public house gatherings known as 'friendly leads'. We do not say it is Dr. Langley's *fault* it may be a constitutional infirmity.⁷⁴

Simultaneously, the *Gazette* attempted to sow discontent about the delegates meeting. On 1 June 1872, for example, it published a letter from 'Rather Too Bad' that indignantly complained of the recent levy for delegate expenses.⁷⁵ (All branches wishing to send a delegate had been requested to collect from their members one shilling, to be used to pay the commuting expenses of those attending.) This, the paper claimed, was especially discriminatory to many of the provincial members as they had, on the paper's advice, refrained from joining until the conference date was announced. This meant that they were now forced to pay both union fees and the conference levy at the same time, which was 'an effective bar to a large number of well disposed men being represented at all'. Neither the fact that London members were levied the same amount despite having far smaller overheads, nor that this money was primarily used to reimburse provincials was mentioned. 'W. T. Bass', the *Gazette* complained,

never contemplated that a man's honest desire to elevate himself and better his social position should be intolerably taxed from the outset . . . and we are equally sure that he would be disgusted were any attempt made by any clique or party to take unfair advantage.⁷⁶

As an attempt at provocation, the articles were a success. Langley immediately wrote to the *Bee-Hive* to repudiate the paper's accusations.⁷⁷ The letter to the *Gazette* had been written during business hours with Langley's daughter as witness. It had been hand-delivered and shortly afterwards Langley had received a note from James Greenwood acknowledging its receipt. Finally, the *Gazette* had used sections of the letter—supposedly never received—the following week.⁷⁸ With respect to Langley's behaviour at the Montpelier Arms, Greenwood had not been present, and Langley claimed that he could provide sixty witnesses to contradict the paper's account. The *Gazette* was 'a newspaper the mendacity and ignorance of whose editor is a standing danger to the movement, in which earnest men are engaged—a danger all the greater because the enemy is hidden behind the mask of a hypocritical friend'.⁷⁹ Even amongst the provincials there was now disquiet over the *Gazette's* reporting. John Graham told his provincial allies: 'I read a letter from Dr Baxter Langley stating that what was stated in last week's "Gazette" was anything but the truth . . . I believe he is one of the best men we have at present.'⁸⁰

Clearly the conflict between the *Gazette* and the Executive could not continue. In one editorial Greenwood had suggested that Langley worried whether the *Gazette*, 'the recognised forum of railway reform, would hail him with rejoicing as an advantage to the cause'.⁸¹ Calling the paper's bluff, Langley responded that 'If the railwaymen are to have an organ, they have a right to insist it is at least just to their friends, or that it shall cease to be their organ'.⁸² On 28 May, he acted on this threat and an Executive Council meeting—with every branch in London represented—unanimously passed a resolution that the *Railway Service Gazette* no longer be recognised as the ASRS's official publication and that the *Bee-Hive* take that honour. A delegation from London was sent to Bass to inform him of the meeting's decision.⁸³ In addition, Langley threatened the paper with an action for libel. Even Bass, a strong supporter of Vincent, Greenwood and the *Gazette* could not ignore the growing acrimony, nor forgive the paper's repeated attempts to disrupt the delegate conference. Shortly afterwards he demanded Greenwood's resignation.⁸⁴ His replacement was Edwin Phillips, another provincial and a

supporter of Vincent, but one able to put personal feelings aside and acknowledge the legitimacy of the Executive. An immediate reconciliation followed, Langley contributed to the new editor's first issue and the *Gazette* published an editorial praising the work of the Executive Council, and Langley in particular.⁸⁵

Having effectively neutralised the *Gazette*, Langley's next task was to prepare the delegate conference. On 20 May 1872, he commissioned an advertisement in *The Times*:

Secretary wanted. By the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants, a gentleman to act as General Secretary. Must be over forty years of age, with good address and accustomed to conduct correspondence and keep accounts. A guarantee of £200 will be required. Salary, £250 a year. Applications, with references and copies of testimonials, to be made by letter only to Dr. Baxter Langley, 50, Lincolns Inn Fields, on or before May 20th, 1872.⁸⁶

That Langley chose *The Times* rather than the *Gazette* or even the *Bee-Hive* is surprising. It would be easy to see this as a deliberate attempt to further exclude Vincent, who was unlikely to read *The Times*. If so, it was effective as Vincent failed to place his name amongst the nominations. Langley denied any such machinations, however, writing in the *Bee-Hive* that 'One gentleman who was certainly expected to become a candidate had not sent in an application'.⁸⁷ When questioned further he merely stated:

I consider it necessary to secure the services of a first-class man, who by knowledge of parliamentary and other business would be competent to conduct the whole correspondence with members of parliament and others. The GAZETTE did not seem to me likely to circulate amongst the sort of men we ought to get.⁸⁸

Vincent himself never accused Langley of artifice and with Graham no longer an ally; the *Gazette* in unaffiliated hands; and even Bass not looking fondly upon him, it is more likely that he realised he had overplayed his hand and was unlikely to win the contest.⁸⁹ In fact, the degree to which Vincent had lost the men's trust was shown by him having 'unexpectedly attended' a London meeting at which Langley was speaking. There he had asked if he would be permitted to attend the following day's conference. Langley enquired whether



Figure 14: The First ASRS Delegate Conference, 1872 (Alcock, *FiftyYears*, p. 65).

Vincent held the formal nomination of any provincial branches and upon being told he did not, advised that his admittance would break the Society's rules. Nevertheless, he promised to put it to the delegates the following morning. This he did and after some heated debate a vote was taken with eighteen delegates voting in favour and thirty-eight against—Vincent's admittance being duly denied.⁹⁰ Throughout the remainder of the conference Langley made conciliatory gestures. He offered to resign, both as chairman of the meeting and from the post of Executive President (on both counts this was refused). When asked to cast the deciding vote on which rule book was to be adopted—Manchester or London—Langley chose the provincial code.⁹¹ Other matters were less easy to solve. Rival suggestions for the permanent Executive were posited; some suggesting that it should have a different location each year, thereby ensuring its accessibility to those working outside the metropolis. Langley pointed out the drawbacks of having no reliable contact address, not least that the General Secretary and his family would be denied a permanent home. Moreover, with Thomas Bass shortly to introduce a Parliamentary Bill to restrict working hours within the industry, a London base was essential.⁹² The vote again went his way. The final action of the conference was to declare the results of the leadership ballot. This was: Chapman—1,489; Graham—1,137; May—929; Bayley—49; and Heath—3.⁹³ Chapman was duly elected permanent General Secretary and the meeting concluded.⁹⁴

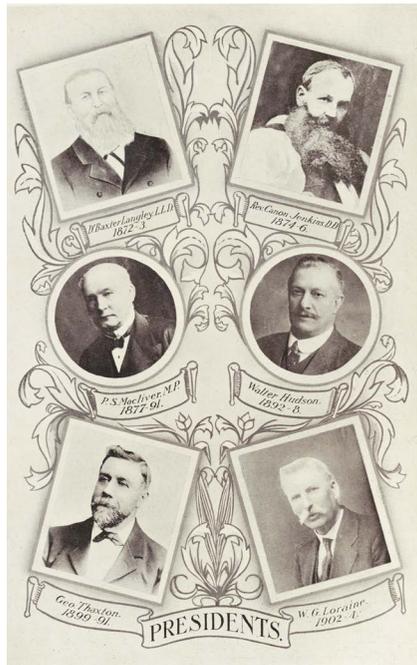


Figure 15: Langley as first Executive President of the ASRS (Alcock, *Fifty Years*, p. 129).

Through Langley's unceasing efforts and diplomatic skills, the ASRS was now registered, had a permanent executive and a democratically elected General Secretary. It could boast the patronage of Thomas Bass, the support of the *Railway Services Gazette* and the *Bee-Hive*; and although suspicion undoubtedly remained between London and the provinces, it was no longer enough to prevent the membership working together. It was just as well, as the seeds of the union's first conflict had already been sown.

In May 1872, workers on the London and North Western Railway (L&NWR), aware of the huge 8.25 per cent dividends that the company had announced for that year, submitted a memorial for an increase in wages of between 2s 6d and 3s per week and a reduction in working hours to twelve per day.⁹⁵ Management refused to acknowledge receipt of the memorial but immediately commenced action against those responsible. One of these, Parnemus Tarbox, a capstan man at Camden Station, who had both attended and on at least one occasion chaired meetings of the ASRS, was called into a manager's office after collecting his wages. Here, a supervisor named Jones questioned him about his union membership and—having instructed that 24s be given in lieu of notice—told the eighteen-year company veteran that 'he could go and be chairman of the next meeting, but that he was not to let him see his face in the yard again'.⁹⁶

On 26 May 1872, a densely packed meeting of 300 Camden, Hayden Square, and Broad Street Station goods workers discussed the sacking and immediate industrial action was proposed. Langley recognised the seriousness of the company's actions—to have fired a man for union activities undertaken in his own time was an attack upon the whole viability of the ASRS—but he advocated caution. As Executive President he also recognised the risks inherent in confronting such a major company directly. 'A strike,' he warned, 'like war, ought to be resorted to only when all else had failed'.⁹⁷ Instead he recommended that a small levy be raised to support Tarbox and negotiations commence for his reinstatement.⁹⁸ He assured the men that he had already written to the Chairman of the L&NWR, Sir Richard Moon, apprising him of the men's grievances and reminding management of the memorial (which had still not been answered):

[he] venture[d] to solicit the consideration of the Board and hoped to learn that the directors do not approve of the actions of Mr. Superintendent Jones in this matter, and that your old and faithful servant Tarbox has been reinstated.⁹⁹

Such caution was typical of Langley's measured, legal and long-term approach. Another strategy he proposed (reminiscent of that employed at the Crystal Palace—see Chapter 6), was the infiltration of shareholders' meetings. Langley envisaged the union—once fully solvent—amassing 'two or three thousand pounds' with which to purchase company shares. By this means, every subsequent meeting would include union delegates to state any grievances and requests before an audience of investors.¹⁰⁰ In line with his views on the 'inexorable law of supply and demand', Langley also recommended that rather than simply demand increased wages the union should campaign for shorter working hours. This would force management to increase the number of employees, which would in turn diminish the pool of unemployed railway workers, and thereby increase the value of their labour. Furthermore, by introducing superannuation for elderly or incapacitated workers, who might be called upon to undercut wages, they could remove from the hands of management the threat that 'We have other men who will do the work cheaper than you, therefore unless you accept this reduced rate, you must leave and make room for them'.¹⁰¹

Langley's attempts at negotiation were not aided by the intransigent attitude of Moon and the unionists were soon further incensed by rumours that L&NWR officials had travelled to Dublin to hire '500 or 600' strike-breakers

even before industrial action had commenced.¹⁰² Langley suggested a union man be sent over to counteract such company actions, even offering to pay the expenses himself. After lengthy discussion it was decided instead to put advertisements in all major Irish newspapers urging the Dubliners to decline such tainted employment.¹⁰³

By June, when Tarbox addressed a union meeting, resentment was such that members promised that if he were 'not reinstated in the course of the next few days the servants of the L&NW would turn out to a man'.¹⁰⁴ Such promises, made without the sanction of the Executive Council, or even an official ballot amongst the men themselves, placed Langley and his colleagues in a difficult position. An unsuccessful strike could spell the end of the movement and they were well aware of the union's weakness in terms of factional infighting and financial vulnerability. But if a strike did occur—particularly one over union membership—they would have little choice but to endorse it.

As Moon had failed to respond to his letter, Langley again wrote to the company warning that although the ASRS had 'uniformly advised patience and forbearance on the part of the men' this would not continue if 'the respectful appeals of the men are treated with a contempt which is as short-sighted and impolitic as it is uncourteous and undeserved'.¹⁰⁵ Whether this had a direct influence on company policy is impossible to know, but shortly afterwards, on Sunday 9 June, George Findley—the General Goods Manager—and his subordinate, George Greenish—Chief of the London District Goods Department—received a delegation of Camden workmen. Although each man was taken aside and advised to have nothing more to do with 'Dr Langley and Mr George Chapman' the meeting was cordial. Findley 'met them with kindness, and his behaviour towards them during the whole time they were in conference with him was that of a gentleman'.¹⁰⁶ By the close of the meeting he had conceded both the increase in wages and the reinstatement of Tarbox; Greenish being instructed to facilitate their implementation. This, the *Railway Services Gazette* proudly declared, was 'The first great victory the Amalgamated Society has achieved'.¹⁰⁷ *Reynold's Weekly* concurred, calling it a triumph 'ensured by its moderation and its scrupulous regard for justice to both sides'.¹⁰⁸ That it had been achieved without strike action was a vindication of Langley's methods. Addressing a cheering crowd at Milton Hall, Camden, there was a sense of palpable relief as he declared that he had 'never in his life been more delighted' and that 'It was one of those moments when a man rises above himself and his heart becomes more powerful than his head'.¹⁰⁹

The company was lying. Tarbox was not reinstated. In fact, it was widely believed that Greenish, a strident anti-unionist said to keep a blacklist and to

discipline any man who took part in union activities, had orchestrated his dismissal.¹¹⁰ Shortly after the meeting Greenish confronted a second man, Harry King, who was dismissed for 'wasting the company's time' by distributing union handbills.¹¹¹ To make matters worse, the promised wage increase was distributed only to non-union men.¹¹² A second memorial was sent to the directors asking not only for the reinstatement of the dismissed men but also the removal of George Greenish who had 'lost the confidence of the men generally and this proved his incompetency in the management of large bodies of men'.¹¹³ On 19 July, Greenish himself delivered their reply, informing the men at Broad Street Station that the directors were not willing to fire 'one of their principal officers who has served them faithfully and to their entire satisfaction'.¹¹⁴ He warned them further 'not to be misled by paid agitators'.¹¹⁵

Under such provocation the men hastily convened a meeting at the station's goods yard. To make the atmosphere especially volatile Tarbox was present, while Greenish watched events from a balcony. An immediate strike was proposed but, after urging from the union delegates, the men reluctantly agreed to work their week's notice. Greenish, the target of much hooting and abuse, threatened to lock the gates and exclude the 300 men in attendance but likewise relented, allowing them to work until the following Friday morning.¹¹⁶ On 26 July, however, the men discovered with fury that that Greenish had forbidden cashiers to distribute their final week's wages in full.¹¹⁷ They responded with acts of sabotage; removing addresses from packages that the company was to deliver; hiding tools and turning off the gas supply.¹¹⁸

As Langley had feared, the company was far better prepared for the dispute than the union. Strikers were immediately replaced by 'volunteers from the clerks and experienced men from the country' and any man who remained on duty was rewarded with time and a half for all hours worked and—in many cases—promotion.¹¹⁹ In contrast, the union men were abandoned despite promises of sympathetic action from other metropolitan stations and delivery men. The men of Broad Street and Poplar stations remained at work, while a spokesman for the local 'carmen'—without whom the goods yard could not function—warned that 'they were only being deceived if they thought all the carmen were coming out'.¹²⁰ Even nearby Camden, where goods men had repeatedly voted for industrial action, failed to join the strike.¹²¹ Langley was later to state that he 'felt like a general surrounded by deserters'.¹²² Seeking to negotiate a compromise, Langley wrote to William Cawkwell, General Manager of the L&NWR, suggesting an outside agency adjudicate the dispute and promised that strikers would abide by any decision taken.¹²³ As before, the company refused to acknowledge his letter.

The full measure of company power and the complicit support offered by the authorities was shown on 26 July. At 6pm, 800 Broad Street and Haydon Square, workers and their families assembled in front of the Cobden statue at Camden Town in an attempt to induce the workers there to join them as promised. The men wore blue ribbons in their hats or buttonholes to designate their status as 'turn outs'. Langley arrived in support in a horse-drawn carriage and the men unshackled the 'venerable grey mare' and led the carriage themselves. At 7pm a procession was formed, led by a brass band and with the men singing 'we'll hang old Greenish from a sour apple tree' to the tune of 'John Brown's Body'. This proceeded towards Camden Station.¹²⁴ Here they found a formidable cordon of police in front of the locked gates debarring entrance.¹²⁵ Further groups of Hampstead's S division were inside the building and Albany Street, Kentish Town and Platt Street stations were 'filled with reserves in case of necessity'.¹²⁶ Many of these had been shipped in from outside London; Charles Cotton, for example, who had brought charges against strikers for intimidation, was a detective from Birmingham.¹²⁷

Unable to challenge such a force, the procession turned instead towards a number of Pickford and Chaplin & Horne delivery carts which, but for the strike, would have been based at Broad Street. The presence of company informers was shown by the fact that police were able to warn strike leaders *by name* that if any damage was done to the carts 'the whole power of the police would be exercised and any man who did so would be taken into custody'. Defeated a second time, the men attempted to march to Euston where the same body of police, using a specially provided company train, awaited them and they were again denied access. The union men's palpable frustration threatened to descend into violence until Langley intervened and addressed the strikers in a conciliatory tone.¹²⁸ The union, he claimed, was 'on the eve of a great victory', while the company had forfeited £70,000 through lost business. Despite this, the failure of the strike was apparent.¹²⁹ Even as the march took place the L&NWR boasted that it was now able to handle all deliveries as before.¹³⁰

On 1 August 1872, the union members picketing Broad Street Station received intelligence that blackleg workers from Coventry, Rugby and Scotland had been hired to replace them. The few jobs remaining were available to the first men to cross the picket line. Despite union claims that this was a hoax, and a brass band being brought in to raise spirits, 'two or three' then 'six or seven' and finally 'a dozen or two' strikers removed their union ribbons and entered the premises. By the afternoon company notices adorned the station walls stating 'No More Men Wanted'.¹³¹ With no other choice, Langley declared the

strike officially over.¹³² His final action was to write to the L&NWR Directors, pleading with them to 'treat the men with the generosity which is always conceded by a victorious army to a defeated force'.¹³³ Once again, they did not deign to answer.

The failure of the strike had clearly exposed the fragility of the ASRS. The action had been taken without official sanction and, in Langley's case at least, against his express wishes.¹³⁴ The union had been unprepared financially for the confrontation and in its wake was virtually bankrupt. The Union had paid-out £500 to defeated strikers and a further £6 was offered to any man who wished to emigrate.¹³⁵ Langley had been forced to loan the society £250 in order to keep it financially viable.¹³⁶ Most importantly the men had failed to go through the proper channels before calling the strike. If a proper ballot had been called then preparations could have been made, other branches forewarned, and support ensured. A small-scale strike, involving only low-status employees, only on the L&NWR, and only at two stations was bound to fail.¹³⁷ 'The chief cause of the defeat was the usual one', Langley wrote to the *Gazette*, 'lack of faith in one another'.¹³⁸

In the wake of the defeat, Langley implemented a regulated and disciplined system for the calling of strike action. Union members would first contact their local branch where a ballot would be taken. If action were approved, that branch would forward a statement to the District Committee and—if again endorsed—the request would go to the Executive. All metropolitan and provincial branches would then be contacted and if industrial action was approved for a third time then—and only then—would a strike be called. 'A strike,' Langley reiterated, 'should never be undertaken except under extreme pressure, nor even then without the materials for war being actually at command'.¹³⁹

A further cause for concern for Langley had been the behaviour of the General Secretary, George Chapman. That Chapman had worked hard for the Society and was a fine speaker was indisputable, but during the strike it became increasingly clear that he was not fitted to a bureaucratic position. A total of £711 18s 6d had been expended during the dispute, but Chapman had kept no receipts and no bookkeeping had been done. When a finance committee was appointed, it was forced to examine 'scraps of paper containing scribbled statements'.¹⁴⁰ By the end of 1874, some sixty-three branches owed more than six months' dues and the minutes of that year's Executive Council Meeting passed a resolution 'That this Council expresses its regret at being unable to issue a statement of its funds for 1873, on account of branches owing dues, and not sending in their balance-sheets'. With an annual income of only £710—of

which £600 was required for wages and a further £50 for offices, gas and coal—it was estimated that the Society was losing £20 per year.¹⁴¹

Worse was to follow. On 2 October, an express on the Caledonian line collided at full speed with a stationary goods train causing twelve fatalities.¹⁴² Blame immediately fell upon Alexander Currie, Kirtlebridge's Stationmaster, and Robert Ramsey, the station signalman. Although neither man was a member of the ASRS, a voluntary defence fund was established by union branches. The Executive met and Chapman was instructed to send the Organising Secretary to investigate the case with a view to establishing a legal defence for the two men. Chapman failed to do so, a fact Langley did not discover for nine days, after which he was forced to initiate the enquiry himself, and even then Chapman failed to arrange expenses. Langley wrote to the Organising Secretary:

Dear Sir,—I instructed Mr. Chapman, the General Secretary, to send to you last night by wire, and to remit you by post. To my great annoyance, I have found he had not done so this morning; I fully rely that you will have remittance by this post. May I say that to some extent, I place my honour in your hands in this affair? Success will be useful to you and most gratifying to me; failure will be disappointing to both. For the sake of all parties concerned, let this undertaking be carried out in a manner beyond reproach. You may rely on my support in the matter, and I trust you will not feel hurt by anything I have written.¹⁴³

What made this lack of support especially galling was that this was exactly the kind of incident that Langley had been expecting. Accidents on the railways were not so much regular as ubiquitous. In 1872 no fewer than 130 railway workers had lost their lives during shunting operations alone.¹⁴⁴ This had caused Dr Lankester, acting as Coroner, to ask 'whether such wholesale slaughter was not avoidable?'.¹⁴⁵ Typically, such inquests followed a standard course with a series of company officials and witnesses relating that the accident had been entirely due to human error, that error inevitably being on the part of the deceased or an employee. A verdict of 'Accidental Death' would then be given.¹⁴⁶ But with railway work conditions by this time well known thanks to 'Bass's Crusade' and numerous press exposés, close scrutiny into such accidents could only result in embarrassment for the companies and, quite possibly, victories for the ASRS. At Kirtlebridge swift action was especially important, as it was living, rather than deceased, employees onto whom the company was attempting to shift responsibility.

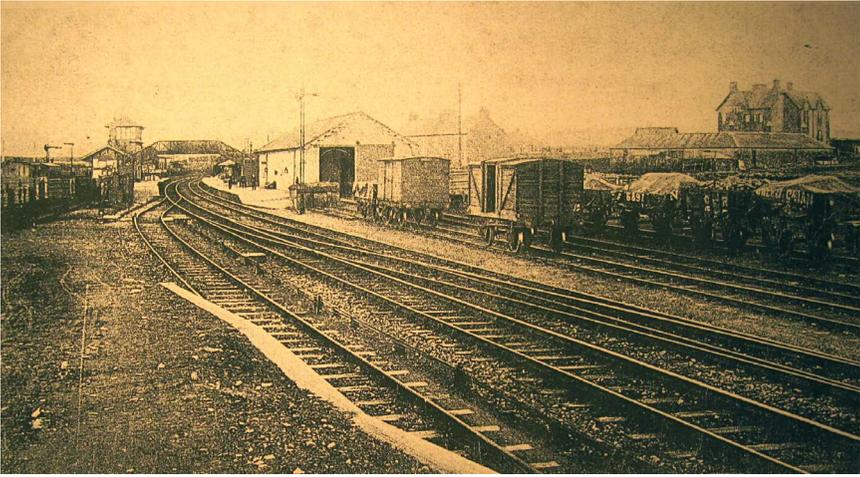


Figure 16: Kirtlebridge Station, scene of the horrific collision (*Glimpses of Old Eaglesfield, Kirtlebridge, Middlebie and Waterbeck*, Dumfries, 2001, p. 30).

This ritual was well underway by the time Langley arrived in Scotland. Both Currie and Ramsey had been taken into custody and charged with Culpable Homicide and Neglect of Duty.¹⁴⁷ Upon closer examination, however, Langley discovered that Currie, accused of ‘allowing and by his own acts causing certain wagons to shunt upon or across the mainline at Kirtlebridge Station’, had regularly been on duty for 16.5 to 17 hours per day and that, in addition to his responsibilities as a station master, he was expected to also act as a goods porter. Robert Ramsey was similarly accused of ‘failing to keep the red or other signal constantly shown at the distance fixed’, but in his defence claimed this was company policy and he had merely been following orders. Tellingly, the Director of Signals on the Caledonian, Mr Blair, failed to attend court to refute this, despite being a Crown Witness.¹⁴⁸ As a result of the investigation with the union and Bass co-funding a determined legal defence, the court found ‘considerable excuse for the Station Master’, charges were dropped and the blame instead apportioned to understaffing and insufficient safety equipment.¹⁴⁹ If the strike had been a disaster, this had undoubtedly been a success. But it had been a victory achieved in spite of—not because of—the General Secretary. Further court cases followed. An inquest into the death of Patrick Preston, a brakesman at Camden station goods yard, was attended by union delegates who successfully called witnesses not only to the accident but also to the hours and conditions under which Preston had laboured.¹⁵⁰ This led to the unprecedented verdict:

Patrick Preston came to his death by accident, but the jury are of the opinion that if Proper precautions had been taken by the L&NWR with regard to signals at Chalk Farm, such a mishap would not have occurred.¹⁵¹

Despite these undoubted successes, internecine conflicts and poor communication remained a constant problem within the ASRS. In March 1872, Manchester railway workers—who had been amongst the most stalwart supporters of the union—staged a strike. Langley, the President of the Executive Council, was only informed of this after its commencement. Instigated without going through the proper protocol the strike was further hamstrung by a lack of administrative oversight. Chapman failed to provide the Manchester railway workers with their promised first instalment of strike pay. This led not only to the collapse of the strike but to the dissolution of the branch amid complaints of union executives acting ‘in a spirit of opposition to everything done by or connected with gentlemen who have been chiefly instrumental in bringing the society to its present state of prosperity’.¹⁵² Such miscommunication caused George Alcock, formerly a strong supporter of Chapman, to describe his administration as ‘blundering incompetence’.¹⁵³

By the time of the second delegate meeting on 27 June 1873, the endemic lack of administrative oversight was such that Langley declared that he could no longer continue as President while Chapman remained General Secretary. Not only was Chapman failing to keep proper minutes but Langley’s instructions and those of the Executive Council ‘were openly repudiated or resolutely disobeyed’.¹⁵⁴ He felt, he told an ASRS meeting, like ‘a captain of a ship the men of which would do nothing but what they liked, and whose first mate would not attend to his instructions’.¹⁵⁵

When Chapman declared his intention to stand for re-election, Langley vowed to resign were he returned. He was not alone. Other members of the Executive joined him in calling openly for the Chapman’s replacement, and the Finance Committee—exasperated by Chapman’s failure to keep records—drew up a special report for the meeting illustrating the precarious nature of union finances.¹⁵⁶ On the day of the conference, leaflets containing Langley’s complaints were distributed to each delegate.¹⁵⁷ Once again, suspicion between provincial and metropolitan delegates came to the fore; Langley, the finance committee and the other disgruntled members of the Executive were all London-based. Provincial delegates viewed their attempts to replace Chapman as an attempted *coup d’état* and rallied to the embattled Secretary. When Chapman was returned Langley handed in his resignation from the union.¹⁵⁸

Without Langley's nurturing presence the movement deteriorated further. The London men suspended Chapman for incompetence and, for a period, two rival and competing Executive Councils existed, each seeking the other's demise. This changed when Chapman failed to be re-elected for a third time; his replacement F.W. Evans being both practical and punctilious financially.¹⁵⁹ The ASRS survived and, through the Taff Vale (1901) and Osbourne (1910) judgments, played a pivotal role in the working-class politics of the period.¹⁶⁰ On Christmas Eve 1875, Langley looked back more fondly upon the union and once again wrote a placatory address to the railwaymen. This explained and repeated his reasons for leaving and wished the movement well. The now fifty-six-year-old Langley saw with satisfaction the direction in which it had travelled:

I was present at its birth; I did my best to nurse it in its early years, and I am too happy in its health and growth to remember that it once kicked me, mistaking me in the dark for an enemy. Bygones now may safely be bygones and something more profitable can now be done than doubting, quarrelling and suspecting.

Your old friend, Faithfully yours,

J. Baxter Langley.¹⁶¹

Notes

- 1 G.W. Alcock, *Fifty Years of Railway Trade Unionism* (London: Co-operative Printing Society, 1922) p. 37.
- 2 'The Builders' Strike', *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 10 August 1859.
- 3 'The Continued Strike', *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 18 August 1859.
- 4 'The Builders' Strike', *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 10 August 1859.
- 5 Joseph Howard, 'Miners' Provident Association—To the Editor of the *Newcastle Chronicle*', *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 19 September 1859.
- 6 'The Slaves of the Bleach Works', *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 12 May 1860.
- 7 *Ibid.*
- 8 *Ibid.*
- 9 *Railway Service Gazette*, 3 February 1872; P.W. Kingsford, *Victorian Railwaymen: The Emergence and Growth of Railway Labour, 1830–1870* (London: Routledge, 1970) p. 119. According to company records, only 7.2 per cent of railway employees worked a ten-hour day.
- 10 J. Sewell, 'Rules and Regulations for the Practical Management of a Locomotive Engine', cited by T. Tredgold (ed.), *The Principles and Practice and Explanation of the Machinery of Locomotive Engines in Operation on the Several Lines of Railway* (London: John Weale, 1850) pp. 8–9.

- 11 J. Baxter Langley, *The Illustrated Official Guide and Tourist's Handbook to the North Eastern Railway and its Branches* (Newcastle: M. and M.W. Lambert, 1863); J. Baxter Langley, *The Dangers of the North British Railway Policy or The Inhabitants of Newcastle and the Surrounding Towns, Candidly Stated and Impartially Discussed, by J. Baxter Langley, Late Editor of The Newcastle Daily Chronicle &c. &c.* (Newcastle: D.H. Wilson, 1861).
- 12 *Ibid.*, pp. 5–7.
- 13 Alcock, *Fifty Years*, p. 41.
- 14 J. Baxter Langley, 'Letter From J. Baxter Langley', *Railway Service Gazette*, 13 April 1872. This occurred on 9 January 1872, a fortnight after the Montpelier meeting. The Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants was formally recognised on 9 February 1872. Such acceptance was by no means automatic. *Berrow's Worcester Journal*, 3 February 1872, for example, reported that the Registrar turned down an application by the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners.
- 15 Alcock, *Fifty Years*, p. 41.
- 16 Philip S. Bagwell, *The Railwaymen: The History of the National Union of Railwaymen* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1963) p. 55.
- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 52; *Amalgamated Society of Engineers' Jubilee Souvenir* (London: Co-operative Printing Society Limited, 1901) p. 11. This organisation had been in existence since 1851. James B. Jeffreys, *The Story of the Engineers, 1800–1945* (London: Lawrence & Wishart Ltd, 1945) pp. 80–81.
- 18 Charles B. Vincent, *An Authentic History of Railway Trade Unionism by Charles Basset-Vincent Originator of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants, The Railway Servant's Orphanage, Derby, The Railway Clerks Association, &c* (Derby: Derby Printers, 1902) p. 33. He had come to Bass's notice through a series of articles in the weekly journal the *Working Man*. When contacted, his financial position was so precarious that he was forced to borrow money for his rail fare and a serviceable pair of boots before travelling to accept the job offer.
- 19 *Ibid.*, p. 33.
- 20 *Ibid.*
- 21 Bagwell, *Railwaymen*, p. 47. The Midland Railway employed some 2,200 men in Derby alone, while Bass breweries used 69,654 railway trucks to transport 500,000 barrels at a cost of £135,000 per annum, making them the *Midland's* largest customer.
- 22 Bagwell, *Railwaymen*, p. 47.
- 23 This is fully detailed in Vincent, Chapter VIII, pp. 35–39 and 50. The *Lancet*, 4 January 1862, for example, warned that 'The worn out engine driver nods, and a hundred lives are in jeopardy'.
- 24 *Railway Service Gazette*, 4 February 1872.
- 25 W.P. Price, Bagwell, *Railwaymen*, p. 49.
- 26 W.P. Price, House of Common Debate, 15 March 1871, vol. 205 cc1-39.

- 27 Alcock, *Fifty Years*, p. 34.
- 28 M.T. Bass, 'Letter to G. Chapman December 27, 1871', cited in Alcock, *Fifty Years*, p. 39:
 'Dear Sir,—It would be a real pleasure to me to accept the office of President of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants, and I feel very grateful for the offer of such a mark of their confidence, but after the best consideration I could give to the subject I have come to the conclusion that I may be of more service to the Society by preserving a perfectly independent position. You may feel perfectly sure that in that quality I shall neglect no opportunity of doing all that is possible for me to promote the best interests of the society.
 M.T. Bass.'
- 29 Alcock, *Fifty Years*, p. 41.
- 30 'J. Baxter Langley', *The Bee-Hive*, 27 April 1872.
- 31 Alcock *Fifty Years*, p. 68 and 78; *The Bee-Hive*, 11 May 1872.
- 32 Alcock, *Fifty Years*, p. 198.
- 33 Bagwell, *Railwaymen*, pp. 52–53.
- 34 Frank McKenna, 'Victorian Railway Workers', *History Workshop*, no. 1, Spring 1976, pp. 46–47.
- 35 G.W. Alcock, *The Railway Servants: A Century of Railway Trade Unionism, 1871 to 1971* (London: N.U.R. Press, 1971) p. 5; Kingsford, *Victorian Railwaymen*, pp. 77–78. Examples of companies uniting to defeat union action can be seen, for example, in the 1867 strike by members of the Engine Drivers and Fireman's United Society, formed only twelve months earlier, on the North Eastern Railway for a reduction in the twelve-hour working day. Management responded by recruiting drivers from the London and North Western Railway, the Midland, the Great Northern Railway and the Lancashire and Yorkshire, with special rates of pay as long as they were not Union men themselves. The strike's ringleaders were charged and of the 1,050 who took part only twenty-five were reinstated.
- 36 'Meeting of the Railway Employees in Sheffield', *Sheffield and Rotherham Independent*, 29 January 1872, for example, reported: 'The meeting then proceeded to decide between Mr. C. B. Vincent and Mr. C. [sic] Chapman for the post of General Secretary. The name of the latter was first put, and not a single hand was held up on his behalf. Mr. C. B. Vincent was then put to the meeting, and every person in the room voted for him.'
- 37 Vincent, *Authentic History*, p. 51.
- 38 Bagwell, *Railwaymen*, p. 56.
- 39 Alcock, *Fifty Years*, p. 51.
- 40 Bagwell, *Railwaymen*, p. 57. The first issue had initially been due on 6 January 1872. Bagwell was in no doubt that it was delayed due to Vincent's fear he would be sidelined if he were not in London during this period.
- 41 *Railway Services Gazette*, 1 June 1872.

- 42 Ibid.
- 43 Ibid., 13 April 1872.
- 44 J. Baxter Langley, 'Letter From J. Baxter Langley', *Bee-Hive*, 27 April 1872.
- 45 Letter from George Chapman to C.B. Vincent, cited in Alcock, *Fifty Years*, p. 44. Emphasis in original.
- 46 Alcock, *Fifty Years*, p. 47. Langley in contrast was signing himself 'Chairman of the Executive Council Provisionally Elected in London'. *Railway Service Gazette*, 13 April 1872.
- 47 *Railway Services Gazette*, Saturday, 9 March 1872.
- 48 Ibid.
- 49 George Chapman, 'Letter of April 1, 1872', cited by Alcock, *Fifty Years*, p. 57. The fact that the letter is written on two types of paper, the first being blue foolscap, the second being white, would suggest that even stationery was in short supply.
- 50 Alcock, *Fifty Years*, p. 57.
- 51 Ibid.
- 52 J. Baxter Langley, Ibid.
- 53 J. Baxter Langley, Alcock, *Fifty Years*, p. 53; Bagwell, *Railwaymen*, p. 58.
- 54 *Railway Services Gazette*, 15 June 1872.
- 55 Alcock, *Fifty Years*, pp. 45–46 and 52.
- 56 Ibid., p. 91.
- 57 Bagwell, *Railwaymen*, p. 58.
- 58 Ibid.
- 59 Alcock, *Fifty Years*, p. 52; Rowland Kenney, *Men and Rails* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1913) p. 143.
- 60 Edwin Phillips, *Full Report of the First General Delegate Meeting of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants* (London: Published at the Society's Office, 1872) p. 12. Samuel Morley MP was so exasperated by the argument he suggested that as neither man was acceptable to both parties it would be better if both stood down.
- 61 Alcock, *Fifty Years*, p. 52.
- 62 'Letter From J. Baxter Langley', *Bee-Hive*, 27 April 1872 (emphasis in original); Phillips, *Full Report*, pp. 10–11.
- 63 Ibid., p. 12.
- 64 *Bee-Hive*, 30 March 1872.
- 65 Phillips, *Full Report*, p. 14.
- 66 *Railway Services Gazette*, 6 April 1872.
- 67 Ibid.
- 68 *Bee-Hive*, 4 May 1872; *Bee-Hive*, 31 May 1872.
- 69 Bagwell, *Railwaymen*, p. 58. *Bee-Hive*, 31 May 1872; Alcock, *Fifty Years*, p. 60.
- 70 John Graham, 'Letter of April 29, 1872', cited by Alcock, *Fifty Years*, p. 62.
- 71 *Bee-Hive*, 11 May 1872.
- 72 Ibid.

- 73 *Railway Services Gazette*, 4 May 1872.
- 74 Ibid. 'Friendly Leads' were entertainment evenings held in public houses. These often led to stump oratory and excessive drinking. Martin Polley, *The History of Sport in Britain, 1880–1914* (London: Routledge, 2004) p. 31. 'There are also harmonic meetings, the free-and-easy evenings, and the friendly leads at the public houses. Until last year there was one place, in the middle of a very poor district, where dancing went on all the year round.'
- 75 'Rather Too Bad', *Railway Services Gazette*, 1 June 1872.
- 76 *Railway Services Gazette*, 1 June 1872.
- 77 *Bee-Hive*, 18 May 1872.
- 78 Greenwood was to have taken over as editor on 18 May, to allow Vincent to concentrate on the forthcoming delegate meeting, but appears to have been in control of the day-to-day running of the *Gazette* by this time.
- 79 *Bee-Hive*, 18 May 1872.
- 80 John Graham, 'Letter of May 9, 1872', cited by Alcock, *Fifty Years*, pp. 62–63.
- 81 *Railway Service Gazette*, 4 May 1872.
- 82 J. Baxter Langley, Letter to Editor, *Bee-Hive*, 31 May 1872.
- 83 *Bee-Hive*, 31 May 1872.
- 84 Alcock, *Fifty Years*, p. 73. Greenwood did not initially accept his dismissal. Finally leaving on 8 June 1872 he demanded a years' notice and threatened legal action to enforce this. The case was eventually settled for £150.
- 85 Phillips went on to publish *A Voice From the Signal-Box: or, Railway Accidents and Their Causes* (London: Longman, Green and Co., 1874). This detailed causes of accidents amongst both passenger and freight trains and was printed in 1874 with the financial aid of Bass.
- 86 J. Baxter Langley, 'Secretary.—Wanted', *The Times*, 20 May 1872.
- 87 *Bee-Hive*, 31 May 1872.
- 88 *Railway Service Gazette*, 1 June 1872.
- 89 Alcock, *Fifty Years*, p. 77. Bass had in fact written a letter of recommendation for another candidate.
- 90 Phillips, *Full Report*, p. 27; Bagwell, *Railwaymen*, p. 62. Both G.W. Alcock and George Graham were equally scathing of C.B. Vincent's later account of the union's formation *An Authentic History of Railway Trade Unionism*. John Graham, Letter [to W. Alcock?], Warwick University Modern Records/Mss.127/AS/6/1/1/47. 'This is about the biggest collection of inaccuracies I have met with, a more fitting title would be C.B.V.'s hallucinations & his appreciation of himself.' Alcock, *Fifty Years*, p. 43, says of Vincent, 'He was a dilettante, sluggish in temperament, as in action. His brain was a hive of plans, few ever matured, unless someone came to his aid and matured them.'
- 91 Phillips, *Full Report*, pp. 28–29.
- 92 Bagwell, *Railwaymen*, pp. 32–33.
- 93 Ibid.

- 94 Phillips, *Full Report*, p. 42. It was suggested some time later that there had been a mistake in the allocation of votes and that if they had been correlated correctly Graham would have emerged the winner. It was not suggested, even by Graham, that this had ever been more than an honest mistake.
- 95 *Railway Service Gazette*, 13 June 1872.
- 96 *Railway Services Gazette*, 8 June 1872.
- 97 J. Baxter Langley, 'Letter to the Editor', May 27, 1872', *Railway Service Gazette*, 8 June 1872.
- 98 *Railway Service Gazette*, 25 January 1872. As he similarly told a meeting of Scottish railwaymen, 'We earnestly hope . . . you will make a handsome compensation to your injured fellow worker, who has been the victim of injustice, rather than waste your energies and the funds of the Society upon any wide-spread cessation of labour'.
- 99 J. Baxter Langley, 'Letter to the Editor', May 14, 1872.' *Railway Service Gazette*, 8 June 1872.
- 100 *Railway Services Gazette*, 1 June 1872.
- 101 'Report of a speech by J. Baxter Langley', *Railway Service Gazette*, 15 June 1872. The example given was that four railwaymen, having their hours reduced from ten to eight hours daily, would necessitate the recruitment of a fifth man to cover the workload.
- 102 *Railway Service Gazette*, 8 June 1872; 'The North Western Railway Servants and Their Grievances', *Daily News*, 3 June 1872.
- 103 *Railway Service Gazette*, 8 June 1872; 'The North Western Railway Servants and Their Grievances', *Daily News*, 3 June 1872.
- 104 *Railway Service Gazette*, 1 June 1872.
- 105 'J. Baxter Langley, 'Letter to the Editor', May 27, 1872', *Railway Service Gazette*, 8 June 1872. Peter Braine, *The Railway Moon—A Man and His Railway: Sir Richard Moon and the L&NWR* (London: PMB Publishing, 2010) p. 401. It is not surprising that Moon declined to answer. He was later to refer to the strike: 'the great parties in this country have patted the working man on the back till he has gone to the trades unions, and now he says "I will do as little as I can for your money."'
- 106 *Railway Service Gazette*, 8 June 1872.
- 107 *Railway Service Gazette*, 15 June 1872.
- 108 *Reynold's Weekly*, 16 June 1872.
- 109 J. Baxter Langley, *Railway Service Gazette*, 15 June 1872.
- 110 *Railway Service Gazette*, 13 June 1872; *Birmingham Daily Post*, 29 July 1872. It was also claimed that he had suppressed the men's original memorial, a replacement being sent to the directors by Langley himself.
- 111 *Railway Service Gazette*, 13 July 1872. To make this more galling, two clerks were employed for six hours a few days later, collecting signatures declaring that the men were sorry that uncomplimentary remarks had been made about someone 'in authority over them'.

- 112 *Railway Service Gazette*, 20 June 1872.
- 113 *Railway Services Gazette*, 13 July 1872.
- 114 *Railway Service Gazette*, 3 August 1872.
- 115 *Ibid.*
- 116 *Railway Service Gazette*, 27 July 1872; 'Railway Servant', *The Times*, 22 July 1872.
- 117 *Railway Service Gazette*, 3 August 1872. The men had worked until the cashier's office was open, which involved several hours longer than their notice required. Greenish had instructed that this extra time was not to receive remuneration.
- 118 *Railway Service Gazette*, 3 August 1872. Langley claimed, somewhat unconvincingly, that this had been done not by 'old hands' but by the men who had been shipped in to replace the strikers.
- 119 'The Strike of the Railway Goods Porters', *Daily News*, 30 July 1872; Bagwell, *Railwaymen*, p. 68; 'The Strike of the Railway Porters', *Reynold's Newspaper*, 4 August 1872.
- 120 'The Strike of Railway Porters', *Morning Post*, 31 July 1872.
- 121 'Strike of the Railway Goods Porters', *Daily News*, 27 July 1872. While fifty men from Camden came, they also received a delegation from the majority who remained at work requesting they withdraw demands for Greenish's dismissal.
- 122 'The Railway Porters' Strike', *The Times*, 2 August 1872.
- 123 'The Railway Porters' Strike', *The Times*, 24 July 1872; 'The London and North Western Railway', *The Times*, Friday, 26 July 1872.
- 124 'The Strike on the London and North Western Railway', *Morning Post*, 29 July 1872.
- 125 'Strike of the Railway Goods Porters', *Daily News*, Saturday, 27 July 1872.
- 126 'The Strike on the London and North Western Railway', *Morning Post*, Monday, 29 July 1872.
- 127 'The Railway Porter's Strike—Conviction for Intimidation', *Daily News*, 31 July 1872, 'Police Intelligence', *Morning Post*, 31 July 1872.
- 128 'The Strike of the Railway Porters on the London and North Western Railway', *Standard*, 29 July 1872.
- 129 'The Strike of Railway Porters', *Morning Post*, 31 July 1872; George Findley, *The Workings and Management of an English Railway* [1890] (6th edn) (Trowbridge: Redwood Burn Ltd, 1899) p. 241. Broad Street was used primarily 'for supplying the early markets with fish, meat, poultry, butter eggs, and other perishable commodities'. John Graham addressing the crowds claimed the company had been forced to bury a large quantity of rotting meat and fish, which it had insufficient manpower to deliver. The company vehemently denied such claims, however.
- 130 'The Strike of Railway Porters', *Morning Post*, 31 July 1872.
- 131 'The Strike of Railway Porters', *Standard*, 30 July 1872; 'The Strike of the Railway Porters', *Reynold's Newspaper*, 4 August 1872; 'Collapse of the Railway Porters Strike', *Daily News*, 2 August 1872.

- 132 Ibid.; He wrote to William Cawkwell, General Manager of the L&NWR at Euston, that he had advised his members 'Not further to prolong resistance against your powerful company, but to accept defeat so as to spare the men any more suffering or privations'.
- 133 *Railway Service Gazette*, 3 August 1872.
- 134 'Letter from J. Baxter Langley', *Railway Service Gazette*, 10 August 1872.
- 135 Bagwell, *Railwaymen*, p. 68.
- 136 *Railway Service Gazette*, 3 August 1872. Langley was still awaiting repayment of this money two years later.
- 137 *Railway Service Gazette*, 8 June 1872. Those involved in the strike were not the highly valued drivers and firemen, but 'Checkers, callers-off, head-shunters, breaks men, horse drivers and porters'.
- 138 J. Baxter Langley, 'Letter to the Editor', *Railway Service Gazette*, 10 August 1872.
- 139 J. Baxter Langley, 'Letter to the Editor', *Railway Service Gazette*, 10 August 1872.
- 140 Bagwell, *Railwaymen*, p. 72.
- 141 Alcock, *Fifty Years*, p. 97; 'Resolution 74', *Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants: Copy of Resolutions Passed at the Executive Council Meeting Held in London on Wednesday October 7, 1874 and the Following Days* (London: Beveridge & Co., 1874) pp. 7–14.
- 142 'Terrible Collision—Eleven Persons Killed; Many Injured', *Sheffield and Rotherham Independent*, 3 October 1872.
- 143 J. Baxter Langley, Alcock, *Fifty Years*, pp. 91–96.
- 144 T.A. Brocklebank, *Swansea—Official souvenir of the visit of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants, including a description of the town* (Swansea, 1902), NA/ Filed/ Room 2C/Bookcase 3.
- 145 *Railway Services Gazette*, 3 February 1872.
- 146 Two examples from the pages of the *Railway Service Gazette*, 3 February 1872, serve as an illustration. The death of Adolphus Rooks, a forty-eight-year-old engine fitter, occurred after he had been sent into a shed to repair the cylinder cover on a Birmingham Locomotive. Another engine was stationed within the shed, 'about a yard and a half' from the one to be repaired. Rooks passed between the two engines to reach the pit to commence repairs when a third train entered, hitting the 'dead' locomotive which lurched forward crushing Rooks between the two stationary trains. The Chief Foreman of the locomotive yard, Mr Charles Clare, gave evidence that although every enquiry into the events had been made no one was to blame for the accident except the deceased. 'So many engines passed through the shed in the course of a day, that the men became careless.' The jury then recorded a verdict of 'Accidental Death'. The same issue of the *Gazette* reported the death of Henry Hooker, a chief guard who was 'thrown with violence' from a moving train whilst attempting to close some

unlocked carriage doors. Although the train had stopped briefly it had not retrieved Hooker, instead notifying the Stationmaster upon their arrival further down the line. The recovery party found Hooker with both legs smashed at the knee, indicating a train had run over him, and severe head injuries. As with Rooks, the verdict was 'Accidental Death'.

- 147 'How Railway Tragedies are Caused', *Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle*, 5 October 1872; L.T.C. Rolt, *Red For Danger: A History of Railway Accidents and Railway Danger* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1976) pp. 63–64. The train involved was the 9pm Scotch express from Euston, consisting of eighteen carriages drawn by two locomotives. Due to delays the train was running one hour and fifty minutes late. At 7.44pm a goods train arrived at the station intending first to drop goods wagons on the down line, then to move to the up line to clear them. Those in charge of the shunting failed to keep the signalman updated with their actions, and the cross over points were some 300 yards from the signal box, and in any case were controlled by ground points. Whilst this shunting was occurring the express, travelling at 40 miles per hour appeared.
- 148 *Railway Service Gazette*, 25 January 1873.
- 149 'The Kirtlebridge Railway Accident', *Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle*, 12 October 1872.
- 150 *Railway Service Gazette*, 3 February 1872.
- 151 *Ibid.*
- 152 Alcock, *Fifty Years*, pp. 99–101; *Bee-Hive*, 24 May 1873. At a meeting, angry workers were told that 'Owing to some mismanagement by the London Executive, the men were disappointed on Saturday in not receiving their first instalment of strike-pay'.
- 153 Alcock, *Fifty Years*, p. 102.
- 154 *Ibid.*, p. 101.
- 155 *Ibid.*, p. 101.
- 156 *Ibid.*, p. 102.
- 157 J. Baxter Langley, *To The Members of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants* (London, 1875). WMR/Mss.127/AS/6/1/1/27.
- 158 Alcock, *Fifty Years*, p. 102.
- 159 Bagwell, *Railwaymen*, p. 72. Vincent had also stood for the post, coming third.
- 160 See Bagwell, *Railwaymen*, Chapter VIII, 'The ASRS and the Labour party: Taff Vale', pp. 199–230; and Chapter IX, 'The ASRS and the Labour Party: The Osbourne Case', pp. 231–61.
- 161 Langley, *To The Members of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants*.

Aspiring to Parliament, 1865–1874

On 24 January 1865, William Angerstein (1811–1897), one of the two Liberal party members for the borough of Greenwich, attended a meeting to address his constituents.¹ Commonly known as the ‘Three Towns’, the electoral borough covered the districts of Woolwich, Deptford and Greenwich. As a large electorate it returned two members to Parliament. Angerstein was a scion of one of the area’s wealthiest families, owner of the large Woodlands estate and had been one of the constituency’s two elected members since 1859. The other representative, David Salomons (1797–1873), had made a fortune as an underwriter and banker, was an ex-Lord Mayor of London, and had held his seat since 1851. Angerstein received a warm reception, the audience attending the Deptford Literary Institute being largely made up of the wealthy and respectable members of the Greenwich Liberal Association. His speech was followed by that of a Mr Blake, who stated to applause: ‘What Greenwich required was that which the borough possessed—a gentleman of straightforward principles, of position, and social influence to represent them.’² Opposing this congratulatory bonhomie was Robert Forder, a working-class employee of the Woolwich Arsenal and a member of the ‘Borough of Greenwich Parliamentary and General Debating Society’. Rather than being the descendant of a wealthy and respectable local family, Forder was the son of Norfolk agricultural labourers; he was a freethinker, a future organiser of the area’s Reform League, Secretary of the West Kent Secular Union, and would be prosecuted for his resistance to the Plumstead Common enclosures.³ Rising uninvited to take the stage, Forder proposed an amendment that Angerstein was—due to his recent opposition to the Oxford Test Abolition Act—‘no longer fit to stand for the borough of Greenwich’.⁴ It was a provocative act indicative of the distrust and resentment that existed between the working and middle-class Liberals of the borough. It was a conflict in which Langley was soon to become involved and he was to stand repeatedly for parliamentary

election at Greenwich. Although an educated professional from a respectable ecclesiastical family, it was amongst working-class Liberals, rather than those of his own class, that he found a receptive audience.

The Greenwich Liberal Association—which had called Angerstein's meeting—was well established, well funded and enjoyed both the endorsement of the national party and the patronage of the local Liberal paper the *Kentish Mercury*. As such, it viewed itself as the authorised representative body for Liberal aspirations within the constituency. It welcomed and promoted candidates such as Angerstein, who were often appointed by the national headquarters, and, in turn, received their public patronage. But although Greenwich remained a bastion of Liberal politics, there had been a growing resentment amongst local workers towards the autocratic—or as some considered—high-handed, attitudes displayed by the Association towards its working-class support base. By attending the meeting, Forder was giving voice to the widely-held perception that the Association had little interest in the concerns of the wider working community, and that a greater degree of control over the selection process of local members, and of the policies that they pledged themselves to support, was required.

What gave working-class activists, such as Forder, the confidence to assert themselves, lay in the large and highly skilled nature of the local electorate. Greenwich boasted 6,907 voters in 1854 and by 1866 this had risen to 9,765.⁵ More importantly, some 52.7 per cent of these were £10 occupiers, meaning that the majority were of the artisan working class.⁶ A large proportion of these artisans were employed in major industrial works such as the Woolwich Arsenal and this close-knit environment—enhanced by local groups such as the Debating Society and the Woolwich, Plumstead and Charlton Reform Association—encouraged a sense of political participation and solidarity. For example, some 70 per cent of eligible Greenwich electors voted when the national average was only 53 per cent.⁷ This desire for greater involvement had been clearly shown in 1857 when John Townsend (1819–1892)—a radical nominee—had challenged and defeated the official Liberal Party candidate, Montague Chambers (1799–1885).⁸ The victory had been short-lived. Within eighteen months Townsend had been forced to file for bankruptcy; a good deal of the £5,901 that he owed being election expenses.⁹ The Greenwich Liberal Association reasserted its ascendancy and the far more moderate David Salomons had taken Townsend's place in Parliament. Despite this setback, by 1865 a largely working-class movement existed, expressing independence, political awareness and—whilst never wishing to break completely from the more mainstream branch of local Liberalism—neither was it content with a subservient role or

with less-than-full political status. The antagonism between the middle and working-class wings of Greenwich Liberalism was shown not only in Robert Forder's interruption of Angerstein's meeting, but also—and perhaps more pertinently—by an audience member, the Reverend Mr Gascoigne, indignantly demanding to know of Forder 'if he was an elector?'.¹⁰

Although he had never previously stood for Parliament, Langley was familiar with the electoral process and had on several occasions taken a pivotal role in the campaigns of others. In 1852 he had been active in Oldham where the Congregationalist Liberal William Johnson Fox (1786–1864), had opposed the Wesleyan Conservative James Heald (1796–1864).¹¹ Originally, Heald had held ambitions to represent Stockport and, as Editor of the *Stockport Mercury*, Langley had reported on the political skulduggery that he employed during his campaign, accusing him of bribing potential supporters with 'liquors of every description'.¹² Despite such inducement, and perhaps in part due to the Langley coverage, the Liberal James Kershaw had won the contest by a margin of 545 votes.¹³ In 1852 when Heald stood for the seat of Oldham, he portrayed himself as a philanthropist and benefactor. Langley again joined the campaign opposing his election; exposing his largesse as both self-serving and politically motivated. Heald had removed his support for the Stockport Mechanics' Institute—Langley informed Oldham audiences—the moment that they had declined to back his election campaign. Similarly, the Stockport Sunday School had been impoverished when the devout Wesleyan had discovered that it taught local children literacy on the Sabbath.¹⁴

Langley continued to take a prominent role the following year during the 1853 Blackburn by-election. In an area notorious for political violence, this had taken considerable courage.¹⁵ Shortly after his arrival, the hired followers of Conservative candidate W.H. Hornby (1805–1884) had occupied the Rose and Crown Inn. Led by the infamous 'Bloody Dick' and 'liberally supplied with stimulants', they prevented the public house being used as a campaign headquarters by the Liberal candidate. When the Liberals moved their headquarters to a second public house—the Fox and Goose—the 'Hornbyites' (around 100 in number) forced their way inside and assaulted the tavern's proprietor, Mrs McGee; 'Bloody Dick' striking her with an iron bar, his comrades 'kicking her unmercifully' and some even attempting to set her dress alight. With their enemy's headquarters thus neutralised the Tory mob had taken possession of a nearby bridge. This controlled access to the city centre, and they were therefore able to prevent Liberal voters from reaching the polling stations. At substantial personal risk, Langley had addressed a meeting of the local drapers. These men, of Scottish origin, were known to hold Liberal sympathies. Inspired

by Langley's presence, some seventy to eighty of these men had defied the mob and marched en masse to cast their votes. Revenge for this defiance was not long in coming. Local Tories had marked the drapers' dwellings with chalk crosses and the following evening 'Bloody Dick' and his entourage returned to smash windows with hammers and missiles.¹⁶ When driven off by neighbours bearing firearms, the mob had toured the streets assaulting anyone that they suspected of Liberal sympathies. The Riot Act was read and the local police—numbering only eleven men—had been bolstered the following morning by the arrival by train of the military.¹⁷ Clearly, to stand firm in the face of such intimidation was a courageous action on Langley's part. Nor should his involvement be undervalued. The Liberal candidate Montague Fielden (1816–1898) won the contest by the narrow margin of fifty-seven votes, making Langley's contribution extremely significant.¹⁸

Matters in Greenwich came to a head in 1865 when Angerstein, 'after grave consideration', joined Sir John Lubbock (1834–1913) in an attempt to win the seat of West Kent rather than stand for re-election in Greenwich.¹⁹ Sir Charles Tilston Bright (1832–1888), another wealthy Liberal, immediately stepped forward to take Angerstein's place. Known for his extravagant spending and love of hunting and fishing, Bright's only link to the borough was that in 1858, as a civil engineer, he had successfully laid a transatlantic cable much of which had been constructed in Greenwich. This, Bright claimed, made him 'a household word within the borough'.²⁰ Bright also hired an actor to assume the identity of a local working man and describe him at meetings as 'the real working man's candidate'. With no prior experience of politics, Bright was an unlikely choice but was soon accepted by the established Borough of Greenwich Liberal Association.²¹ The more radical element of Greenwich Liberalism was less receptive. A.L. Fordham (like Forder, an Arsenal artisan) attended Bright's inaugural election meeting and questioned him at length on his reformist credentials. He received a predictably measured response. Bright stated that 'in theory he believed that a man had an inherent right to the suffrage as soon as he is born', but also that he would not support any such measure as universal suffrage as it 'would give a preponderance of power to those who paid the least amount of taxation, to the injury of those who paid the majority of the taxes'.²² Such convictions, or lack of them, led Fordham to declare that Bright was 'not a fit and proper person to represent the borough of Greenwich'.²³ With Salomons similarly opposed to universal suffrage, and the Conservative candidate—the Sixth Baronet, Sir John Heron-Maxwell (1805–1885)—hostile to both the ballot and any extension of the franchise, this effectively excluded the aspirations of

a large percentage of the community from the electoral process.²⁴ In their rejection of Bright as a suitable candidate, the radical Liberals of Greenwich were simultaneously calling for a replacement. On 7 July 1865, Langley addressed an open-air meeting in Beresford Square, Woolwich, and announced his intention to stand.²⁵

In truth, Langley must have been aware that there was little chance of victory. Voting was scheduled for 12 July, leaving him only four days in which to campaign. The two official candidates were—despite Bright’s apparent unsuitability—virtually unassailable. David Salomons had represented the area for fourteen years and even the radical Fordham had admitted that ‘he must be elected again’.²⁶ Although largely unknown to electors, Bright was backed publicly by Salomons and warmly introduced to electors by Angerstein. The former MP, who retained close links to the borough, had warned that failure to vote for Bright would be an act of disloyalty to the Liberal Party and would risk the seat falling to the anti-reform Tory candidate. The local paper, the *Kentish Mercury*, simultaneously ran a campaign mocking the working-class radicals’ call for greater involvement:

As long as they kept from intruding themselves upon the public they were free to talk any amount of nonsense, free to carry any number of nonsensical motions they pleased, without incurring the risk of public criticism . . . [but] the more we look at that opposition, the more eminently illiberal, the more unwarrantably factious, the more egregiously absurd does it appear.²⁷

What spurred Langley to compete in an unwinnable contest was not self-aggrandisement but his continuing opposition to slavery and attempts by the Confederate States of America to utilise British shipbuilding facilities (see Chapter 4). In addition to the official nominees, a ‘radical’, Captain Douglas Harris, had also announced his candidature. Harris claimed to be a ‘progressive Liberal’ but he opposed the ballot and advocated the recognition of the Southern States of America.²⁸ For Langley it was inconceivable that an apologist for the Confederacy should seek to represent the Greenwich radicals, even in an unsuccessful campaign. Upon announcing his candidature, Langley challenged Harris to an open debate and warned locals:

Captain Harris came before them on the most absurd pretensions. He was on the one hand a democrat, and yet in favour of that most gigantic rebellion against the working classes, the rebellion of the

South against the North. The cause of the black man in the Southern States was the cause of the working classes all over the world.²⁹

In this respect Langley's campaign was a success, with Harris retiring before voting was counted.

Throughout the by-election, Langley endured accusations of being a Conservative stooge hired to split the Liberal vote.³⁰ The *Kentish Mercury* simply advised 'Of Mr. Baxter Langley the less said the better'.³¹ Amongst the large contingent of working-class radicals, however, Langley found an enthusiastic and receptive audience. By the very act of standing Langley had confronted the cosy understanding that existed amongst the wealthy contenders, and challenged the assumption—current in both Tory and Liberal camps—that the radical working-class electors did not deserve a voice.³² This cosiness was clearly illustrated when the candidates stood on the hustings to address the electorate.³³ Angerstein began his speech with a statement that he had 'every respect socially for his gallant [Tory] friend Sir J. H. Maxwell'; Maxwell responded by stating 'he was happy to be placed next to the worthy [Liberal] Alderman [Salomons]'; Salomons nebulously stated he would 'give his support to any measures which he believed to be calculated to make the nation more prosperous and the people more happy', and Sir Charles Bright fawningly declared that 'he should give his support to those measures that Alderman Salomons supported'. Langley, alone of the candidates, stated his beliefs and his objectives. Pointedly dedicating his speech not only to the electors, but also to the non-electors of Greenwich, Langley proposed a series of uncompromising reforms and did so in such a fashion as to make them appear logical, sensible and achievable. Langley was in favour of manhood suffrage, he supported the ballot, favoured non-sectarian education open to all religions, improved sanitation, and 'an equalisation of the rates to prevent the aristocratic portion of the community' avoiding 'payment of their share of the burdens of the country'. Although the voting did not reflect his impact upon the campaign, even *The Times* admitted that 'The show of hands for Mr. Baxter Langley was scarcely inferior to that of Mr. Alderman Salomons and Sir Charles Bright'.³⁴

The results of the poll were declared on 15 July:

Mr David Salomons (L)	4,499
Sir Charles Bright (L)	3,691
Sir John Maxwell (C)	2,328
John Baxter Langley (L)	190
Captain Douglas Harris (L) . . .	116 ³⁵

Although decisively defeated, Langley had forced Harris to retire, and had shown that the working-class radicals of the Debating Society could do more than simply express dissatisfaction with their better-organised rivals. On 13 July 1865, Langley wrote to his spymaster, Thomas Haines Dudley, to report:

I have been down in Greenwich and had the satisfaction of completely ‘smashing’ up a ‘southern sympathiser’ calling himself ‘Captain Douglas Harris’ who wanted to get into the Liberal camp. In the effort I became the object of particular enthusiasm and hope to gain the seat at the next election.³⁶

That election came in November 1868 and by this time Langley’s prospects had greatly improved. The previous year’s Reform Bill had increased dramatically the number of Greenwich electors from 9,765 in 1866 to 14,034.³⁷ This aided Langley’s campaign, especially as it was from this newly empowered socio-economic group that he drew his support, and as a prominent member of the Reform League he could himself take some credit for the sweeping enfranchisements. Since first standing, Langley had also increased his visibility within the area.³⁸ In 1867, for example, he had attended the inquest into the death of five boys at the Woolwich Arsenal. Witnesses—aged 12 and 13—who had been employed filling cartridges with gunpowder, reported a boy called Pigge striking a loose firing cap with a wooden mallet that had been left on the premises. It was a case reminiscent of both the Burradon Mining Disaster and prescient of the many deaths that Langley was to encounter through the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants (see Chapters 3 and 8). The inquest was brief and was conducted with the assumption that the deaths would be ruled as ‘accidental’. Langley, on behalf of the families of the deceased, retained the services of a lawyer named Merriman.³⁹ Although negligence was not proved, criticism was levelled at the foreman who had been reading at the time of the explosion, at the system of piecework employed and at the lack of health and safety measures in place.⁴⁰ Langley also attended numerous reform meetings within the area and during this period published *A Brief Biography of J. Baxter Langley, M.R.C.S. & F.L.S. Together with a Report of Some of His Speeches Delivered in Greenwich Deptford & Woolwich in the year 1866*.⁴¹ This pamphlet, which gave clear descriptions of his political ambitions, was distributed widely amongst the electorate.

Whilst Langley diligently courted the support of local working people, the standing MP Charles Bright, by contrast, was said to have ‘forfeited the confidence of his constituents by his continual and protracted absences’.⁴² News of

the election had to be cabled to the West Indies, where Bright was working having returned to his previous profession of engineering. He announced his decision not to stand via a hastily written letter.⁴³ Bright's absenteeism provided a significant opportunity for Langley. Although the Greenwich Liberal Association remained implacably opposed to his candidature, they had no one positioned to fight the campaign. Langley, under no such handicap, moved swiftly and efficiently. By the time a suitably moderate and wealthy rival candidate—General Sir William Codrington (1804–1884)—had been selected, Langley had addressed eleven election meetings in the borough, all of which were said to be 'crowded to excess'.⁴⁴

It was at this point that broader political events intervened. Although the forthcoming election was expected to return a substantial Liberal majority, the established Parliamentary Liberal leader (and future Prime Minister), William Ewart Gladstone, was facing bitter opposition in his seat of South Lancashire. The original seat of South Lancashire having been abolished by the Reform Act of 1867, Gladstone chose to stand for the newly constituted South West Lancashire seat. Religious groups, alarmed by Gladstone's proposed disestablishment of the Irish Church, ran a concerted campaign to undermine his return. It was also rumoured that the Carlton Club had spent considerable sums funding the campaign in order to oust the Liberal leader.⁴⁵ As candidates were at this time allowed to stand for more than one seat, Angerstein and the Greenwich Liberal Association's Honourable Secretary, William Cox Bennett (1820–1895), proposed that the now vacant seat be used by Gladstone as a fallback constituency.⁴⁶ If he failed in Lancashire, he could be assured of success in the safe Greenwich constituency. The choice for Langley therefore was to abandon his three-year campaign to capture the borough or continue in direct opposition to the interests of his own party leader and one of the greatest political figures of the day.

On 10 July, Langley wrote to the newspapers:

Sir—My address to the electors of Greenwich and my candidature for that borough having been noticed in your columns, permit me to state that I have felt bound in loyalty to our great Liberal leader, to withdraw my claims upon the electors, and that I have publicly pledged myself to do all in my power to secure the return of the Right Hon. W. E. Gladstone by the complete unanimity of the Liberal Party. In the event of Mr Gladstone being elected for South Lancashire, and deciding to sit for that constituency, I shall renew my candidature; but if, unfortunately, he should be defeated in the

North, I am sure that the most enthusiastic of my supporters will approve of the course which I have taken to assist in securing for Greenwich the distinguished honour of being represented by the ablest and most earnest statesman of modern times.

– I am, Sir, yours obediently J. BAXTER LANGLEY.⁴⁷

True to his word, Langley not only stood aside but also actively campaigned for Gladstone's election. On 8 July, Langley visited the Woolwich Lecture Hall and proclaimed his support for the Liberal Party leader. On 15 July, he did likewise at the Greenwich Lecture Hall.⁴⁸ On 10 August, he again spoke in Greenwich and on 16 September, at the Literary Institute, Deptford.⁴⁹ On the night of the Lancashire contest Langley joined a meeting of Liberal supporters in Deptford. Here he announced the latest developments, received via hourly telegrams, to the assembled crowd.⁵⁰ When Lancashire rejected Gladstone, his election for Greenwich—and therefore the culmination of Langley's act of selflessness—was assured. Shortly afterwards Gladstone addressed his new constituency:

Gentlemen,—it has up to this day, been my duty to withhold any expression of my gratitude for your generous, unasked, and I believe unparalleled kindness, which at this important juncture has given me a most honourable seat in parliament. Yesterday, about one o'clock I became aware that I should probably be able to accept the trust you have tendered to me, and I now lose no time in accepting it with my cordial and respectful thanks.⁵¹

As expected, the poll on 18 November gave the two Liberal candidates a comfortable majority (although it is interesting that Gladstone nevertheless came second to his junior colleague, Salomons):⁵²

Salomons (L)	6,684
Gladstone (L)	6,386
Sir Henry Watson Parker (C) . . .	4,372
Viscount Mahon (C)	4,704

Gladstone, due to his acceptance of the post of First Lord of the Treasury, was forced in December 1868 to stand a second time (owing to a now defunct rule relating to re-election upon the acceptance of any post of Cabinet rank).⁵³ This time he was unopposed.⁵⁴

Although greater events had frustrated Langley's ambitions, he remained focused on the borough. In fact, he was able to use these events to his advantage. As an independent, his standing-down was widely viewed as an act of personal sacrifice. Codrington had also resigned but, as a party nominee, he had enjoyed no such enhanced reputation. Moreover, in the event that Gladstone held the Lancashire seat, Langley had stated his intention to re-join the contest. Had Codrington, or another replacement, done likewise, Langley's genuine, local support base would have enabled him to launch a far more efficient campaign.⁵⁵ Had Codrington declined, Langley could have run unopposed by the moderates, or perhaps have adopted the mantle of official candidate. Even with Gladstone taking the Greenwich nomination, there was a price for the working-class support that Langley had brought the (now) Prime Minister. In the run up to the election, a delegation of local radicals (thirty in number) had attended Angerstein and demanded to know whether the Liberal Association's Election Committee 'would support the working man's candidate at a future election if the working men supported Alderman Salomons and Mr. Gladstone at the coming election?'. And, in future contests, 'Would the Committee start a rival candidate in opposition to the working man's candidate?'.⁵⁶

Angerstein later denied making any concessions, but both the *Daily News* and several eyewitnesses reported him promising to 'take no steps to start a candidate against Mr. Langley on any future occasion'.⁵⁷ Even amongst the moderate Liberals, Langley's increased influence was apparent. When Gladstone celebrated his victory on Blackheath on 21 December 1868—mere weeks after being invited by the Queen to form his first government (3 December)—Langley joined him on the platform, as did the borough's other MP David Salomons. To onlookers it must surely have appeared that Langley was a man who had been assured of victory, and who had nobly stood aside in the interests of party unity, rather than a candidate who had received fewer than 200 votes in the previous contest.⁵⁸

With his reputation thus enhanced, Langley employed it in his dealings with the local community. In many ways he can be seen as fulfilling Gladstone's constituency work while the Prime Minister attended to national governance. Throughout 1869 he laboured to establish the Deptford and Greenwich Co-operative Shipbuilders Company.⁵⁹ This sought to utilise the skilled dockworkers recently made unemployed by the closure of the Deptford and Woolwich shipyards. Langley proposed the leasing—or even the purchase—of a portion of the now-derelict waterfront. This was then to be used by a co-operative to dismantle obsolete vessels. Regular meetings were held, with Langley facilitating and organising memorials, communication with the

Admiralty and even ensuring that questions were asked in the House of Commons.⁶⁰ Similarly when the anti-free trade ‘Revivers of British Industry’ attempted to hold a meeting in Deptford, Langley attended, rose to the platform and systematically refuted their claims that free trade was the cause of British unemployment. Many of his supporters were present and the meeting ended with the resolution ‘that this meeting sees no reason to return to the practice of protection of trade’. This was carried by a margin of forty-two votes to twenty-seven. The meeting’s chairman acknowledged defeat, and declared that ‘owing he supposed to the popularity of Mr. Baxter Langley the amendment was carried’.⁶¹

Further bolstering Langley’s ambitions was the fact that the standing MP David Salomons (who by this point was in his seventies and in ill health) had indicated he would not again stand for the borough.⁶² Once more Langley set his sight on winning the seat.⁶³ He was assisted in these endeavours by two factors. The first was the May 1869 foundation of the ‘Greenwich Advanced Liberals’ (GAL). Directly challenging the middle-class Greenwich Liberal Association, this grassroots organisation drew 500 local working men to its inaugural meeting and maintained three active branches; one meeting at the Three Tuns, London Street, Greenwich; another at the Star of Temperance, Deptford; and the third at the Montague Arms, Queens Road, New Cross.⁶⁴ By July they had grown sufficiently both in numbers and confidence to hold a meeting in support of Gladstone’s Irish Church Bill on Blackheath, at which Langley addressed a crowd of 3,000 local supporters.⁶⁵

In the GAL Langley found both the manpower with which to continue his electoral campaigning and a sympathetic platform from which to launch otherwise controversial—or even unpopular—campaigns. In 1870, for instance, as Langley joined Josephine Butler’s opposition to the Contagious Diseases Acts, both the Deptford and Greenwich branches of the GAL passed resolutions calling for their repeal.⁶⁶ Although Liberals may generally have decried Langley’s actions in Colchester as ‘unjust to the Liberal Party and calculated to promote disunion’ (see Chapter 7), in Greenwich, at least, he enjoyed a base of support.⁶⁷ In Langley, the GAL found a spokesman and a figurehead for their radical beliefs.

Despite—or more likely because of—the GAL’s foundation distrust, an obstinate refusal to combine resources remained a stumbling block between the moderate and radical wings of the local party. This was not aided by the perceived indifference of Gladstone to the borough. Since his Blackheath celebrations, the Prime Minister had not visited the electorate, nor shown any interest in the local issues—such as the dockyard closures—which concerned it. The resentment that this caused was shown in 1871 when an anonymous petition,

highly critical of Gladstone's local record, was posted extensively around the area.⁶⁸ Citing the 'abused trust' of locals, the petition, which called on Gladstone to resign, was deliberately designed, in format, colour and wording, to suggest an origin amongst disgruntled local Liberals. In fact, a Conservative activist, solicitor and former electoral agent Henry Pook, was responsible. A second placard appeared shortly afterwards, also signed anonymously, by 'An Elector'.⁶⁹ This repeated the accusations of Gladstone's lack of interest in the borough but also promised that 'in the event of Mr. Gladstone resigning his seat they would not forget their old friend and candidate Mr. Baxter Langley'.⁷⁰ Clearly this was intended to heighten tensions between the two Liberal groups and inspire mistrust towards Langley more personally.⁷¹ Many newspapers accepted the placards at face value. The *Bradford Observer*, for example, reported that

Mr. Baxter Langley, acting on a petition calling on the Premier to abandon his seat at Greenwich, has already put himself in the field and asks the electors not to forget their old and true friend.⁷²

Some 4,000 people were claimed to have added their signatures to the petition, many of them local workmen who were later to regret doing so.⁷³ It was through this underhanded attack that the mutually beneficial relationship between Langley and his Advanced Liberal confederates became evident. It was also noticeable that the Greenwich Liberal Association—despite its immense monetary and organisational superiority—did little to counter the attack on Gladstone.

Langley responded to the accusations by immediately writing to the papers denying involvement:

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES

Sir,—Seeing in your paper a paragraph which by inference, implies that I have some participation in the movement asking Mr. Gladstone to resign. I ask the favour to say that I have no knowledge of the movement beyond what is stated in the newspapers, that I have published my disapproval of it, and have repudiated the placard which has been put forward in my name,

I am yours obediently,

J. BAXTER LANGLEY.

50 Lincolns-Inn-Fields, Jan. 7.⁷⁴

It was not long before Langley had his chance to reveal the true nature of the pamphlets. Henry Pook was a local Conservative solicitor who, in an attempt to exploit local resentment, called a meeting at the Greenwich Lecture Hall to agitate for Gladstone's departure. Although capable of accommodating 1,300 people, the meeting was 'filled to overflowing'.⁷⁵ Prominent amongst those present was the co-founder of *Punch* magazine and social reformer Henry Mayhew (1812–1887), who was due to speak, and sixty hired 'roughs' who surrounded the stage to protect the organisers. These men were 'headed by prize-fighters', and according to eyewitnesses, included an infamous pugilist, Teddy Bullen, the 'Brighton Doctor'.⁷⁶ A large delegation of indignant local Liberals was also in attendance. Despite Bullen and his associates 'trying to fight down all opposition', when Pook and Mayhew attempted to speak they faced a cacophony of catcalls. Within minutes the crowd surged forwards in an attempt to take the stage and the speakers ran for the exit, although with protection from their hired security they shortly afterwards returned. Amidst this chaotic scene Langley, accompanied by his own bodyguard of GAL workmen, was carried over the heads of the audience. Despite attempts to prevent access, he was soon on stage and able to address the crowd. Langley refuted systematically the Tory claims there was disarray within the Liberal camp. In doing so he was aided by the moderate W.C. Bennett, the original proposer of Gladstone's Greenwich candidature, who had accompanied him on stage.⁷⁷ A vote of confidence in Gladstone was then called which was carried unanimously.

A follow-up meeting on 16 January—despite entry being limited to those possessing a pre-purchased coupon bearing the dictum—was similarly disrupted: 'The person using this ticket is pledged to maintain order and abide by the decision of the chairman. Known interrupters of meetings will be excluded'.⁷⁸ When Mayhew complained to a heckler that 'he had perhaps done more for the working class than any other man in the country' the interjector replied, with some wit, 'I am sorry for being so ungrateful'. A proposition that 'Gladstone was no longer worthy of being their representative' was met with a counter-proposal in support of the Prime Minister; punches were thrown, and both Mayhew and Pook fled the stage.⁷⁹

In addition to the backing of the GAL a second, and equally important, asset in Langley's campaign for Parliament came from the support of the *Greenwich and Deptford Chronicle and Woolwich Gazette*. Formerly apolitical, the *Gazette* had, in 1869, come under the stewardship of Samuel Peck, a progressive Liberal reformer. Recognising a kindred spirit in Langley the paper had become a steadfast and valuable ally. From the time of Peck's arrival Langley's

campaigning within the borough received detailed and enthusiastic coverage. The paper unashamedly backed Langley's candidature with articles such as the following:

For eight years the voice of DR. LANGLEY had been heard on our platforms where his presence had been welcomed with acclamation and where his utterances have been listened to with respect. His advice and services have always been at the disposal of the industrial classes of Deptford, Greenwich and Woolwich whenever a wrong was to be battled with or a right was to be obtained . . . under these circumstances there is not the slightest doubt but that the united power of the advanced section of the Liberals and the industrial classes of the community will succeed at the proper time in placing at the head of the poll the man of their choice.⁸⁰

As with the GAL, the relationship was mutually beneficial. One of the first major stories that the *Gazette* covered was an exposé on the outstanding electoral expenses of former Conservative candidate Viscount Mahon.⁸¹ Henry Pook, who had been Mahon's electoral agent, was once again involved.⁸² As a solicitor Pook was able to commence legal action with little personal outlay and did so frequently.⁸³ Instead of refuting the accusations of financial impropriety, he responded by bringing a case for defamation and demanding damages of £500. For the newspaper's proprietor such a sum was sufficient to cause bankruptcy. During the ensuing court case, damages were awarded but—indicating the frivolous nature of the Conservative's case—these were limited to a farthing. A celebratory dinner, replete with extensive entertainment, and attended by seventy paying guests was organised subsequently by Langley. At the culmination of this, Samuel Peck, in the seat of honour, was presented with a purse of sovereigns to defray the legal costs of the trial.⁸⁴

By the time of the next election (coming in 1874), Langley was therefore in a much stronger position. But despite his dedicated local campaigning and increased influence amongst the growing number of working-class electors, the more moderate members of the Greenwich Liberal Association persisted in viewing his continued presence with hostility. Equally, the members of the Advanced Liberals were aware that Angerstein's promise of non-interference in the future selection of candidates had been conveniently forgotten. In fact, even as the promise was being made, the moderate faction—it had since been learned—had been contacting potential candidates to undermine Langley's campaign. To further show the conceit of the moderates, their choice to

represent the industrial workers of Greenwich had been the aristocratic the Marquis of Huntingdon.⁸⁵ Such underhand tactics and the failure to acknowledge the wishes of the rank-and-file activists remained a cause of resentment amongst the radicals.

This mistrust remained the largest obstacle to Langley's electoral success. If the moderates again proposed a candidate to run against him there was a strong chance that this would result in his defeat. Conversely, without the support of the now large working-class electorate, it was quite possible that the Liberals would lose and the seat would fall to the Conservatives. To end the impasse Langley attended a 26 February meeting to re-establish the Woolwich, Plumstead and Charlton Liberal Electoral Association.⁸⁶ With the stated object being 'to promote unity amongst all sections of the Liberal party', this meeting intended to select a candidate acceptable to all. In fact, the meeting achieved the opposite and illustrated the clear and insurmountable differences amongst the borough's Liberals. What existed was a fundamental difference of perspective. For the moderate Liberals, the two sides were gathered to pick a candidate to accompany Gladstone to the 1874 election. For Langley and his supporters, the moderates had already chosen their candidate: Gladstone. It was, therefore, the prerogative of the Advanced Liberals to decide who was to stand alongside him.

Despite the importance of the event Gladstone was—once again—conspicuous by his absence. The increasing level of frustration at his neglect of the constituency was evident. When the meeting's Chairman J.R. Jolly read the Premier's letter of apology there were catcalls of 'we have had enough of him', hisses and even one cry of 'Hang him!'.⁸⁷

At the 26 February meeting William Angerstein, the former MP, joined Langley on stage. Having failed to capture the seat of West Kent, Angerstein had returned to Greenwich as Gladstone's election agent and now expressed ambitions to once again represent the borough. His speech was virtually a rejection of every policy to which Langley had given his public support. Angerstein sought to ingratiate himself with his audience by detailing warnings he had received that to attend a meeting in Greenwich was to hear advocacy of 'socialist and republican thought'.⁸⁸ According to Angerstein, he had replied that he had a better opinion of the borough and knew that locals were 'entirely opposed to such things'. He then detailed his political position. He was against any alteration in the Game Laws (which resulted in 10,000 convictions per year), as 'it was his humble opinion that game should be made property'.⁸⁹ He supported religious equality but not if this resulted in the disestablishment of the Church of England and his opinion of education was that 'in every school

there should be an open Bible, or a crying injustice to the rising generation would be perpetrated'.⁹⁰ He concluded his speech with his belief that Liberal meetings such as the one he attended would 'be ever ready to support the dignity of the Crown and the majesty of the law'. Much of his speech was interrupted by cries of 'Bosh' and was peppered with 'ironical laughter'.

Langley's speech directly contradicted that of Angerstein. 'Schools,' he stated, 'should be entirely unsectarian' and 'education should be not only complete but compulsory'.⁹¹ He questioned the logic of supporting both religious equality and the Church of England: 'is it religious equality for bishops belonging to a church with revenues worth five millions a year to sit in the House of Lords to resist every popular measure, whilst other churches had no such privilege?'⁹² And he was in favour of the repeal of the much-resented Game Laws. Langley concluded with a prophecy that the forthcoming election 'would not be a question between Whigs and Tories, but a question between Liberalism and Advanced Liberalism'.⁹³ Upon resuming his seat Langley was 'vociferously cheered'.

On 18 July 1873, the standing MP, David Salomons, died, necessitating an immediate by-election. Angerstein immediately put himself forward. Langley, who had stood aside in the interests of the party once, was in no mood to do so again. In a letter to the *Gazette* he stated:

The moderate Whigs, by attempting an opposition to the Advanced Liberal candidate, will split the party not only on this occasion, but permanently; because the working classes and Advanced Liberals will not consent to a monopoly of the representation of their less advanced fellow Liberals. To them and to the public I have been long pledged, and I shall go to the poll whatever may be the result.⁹⁴

The presence of two rival Liberal candidates not only presented the Conservative candidate Thomas William Boord with an easily exploitable weakness, but it also denied Angerstein the popular working-class support that he needed and Langley the monetary backing that he would have enjoyed as an official candidate. This was of particular import considering the financial losses that Langley had recently suffered supporting the Camden Station strike fund (see Chapter 8). Running for Parliament was an expensive business; the Returning Officer required the substantial sum of £200 before candidature was even recognised.⁹⁵ Langley was at a great disadvantage financially and both Angerstein and Boord were able to spend almost five times as much as Langley and the Greenwich Advanced Liberals.⁹⁶ Throughout the election campaign

Langley was unable to produce flyers and was later to rely upon financial donations from the GAL, who proposed a fund to help pay expenses as ‘they did not think it right that the candidate of the working men should be put to the enormous expense’. Despite such financial difficulties, Langley conducted a remarkable campaign. Between 25 and 30 July, he spoke at no fewer than eleven venues.⁹⁷ In contrast to both Angerstein and Boord, these were all held in the open air, and questions were welcomed from the audience. Despite this, and the support of the *Gazette*, the London Liberal papers threw their support largely behind Angerstein, the *Daily Telegraph* even claimed that Angerstein was ‘the only candidate in front of the borough’.⁹⁸

Even as Angerstein undermined Langley’s Liberal support, he also faced a concerted attack from the Conservative candidate Thomas William Boord (1838–1912). Clearly viewing Langley as the more dangerous adversary, Boord introduced himself to the electors of Greenwich with a series of misrepresentations and accusations against Langley:

I am strongly opposed to the Republican doctrines put forward by Mr. BAXTER LANGLEY. His scheme for the equal sub-division of land amongst all is neither just nor practicable in an old established country. I object to his proposals to destroy Sunday as a day of rest, and to abolish the teaching in schools of the principles of Religion and Morality.⁹⁹

Infuriated, Langley telegraphed the Conservative candidate demanding a retraction and, when this did not occur, proposed an open-air debate in which he could repudiate Boord’s allegations:¹⁰⁰ ‘I challenge you to meet me and vindicate your veracity (if you can) at a large unfettered public meeting on Blackheath, on Friday evening next week August 1, 1873.’ This too was declined. Boord continued with such exaggerated allegations, describing the Advanced Liberals as ‘positively dangerous and subversive to the Constitution of this country’, while the *Kentish Mercury*, which since the Irish Church Reform Bill had changed allegiances and was by this time a Conservative aligned paper, predicted Langley’s electoral failure:

He is to learn at the poll the utter contempt with which the respectable and honest electors of the Borough of Greenwich regard him—as the apostle of an ungodly communism which contemplates not only the overturning of our common Christianity, but the destruction of our free political institutions. A man on the

threshold of a fate such as awaits DR. J. BAXTER LANGLEY at the coming election we cannot help pitying, however much we may despise him.¹⁰¹

More damaging to Langley's campaign than the actions of either candidate or the *Kentish Mercury*, however, was the unpopularity of the government itself. In March 1873 Gladstone had failed to pass his Irish University Bill. This led to his resignation but, due to Disraeli's reluctance to lead a minority government, Gladstone had been forced to resume office three days later.¹⁰² This was hardly a ringing endorsement of the Premier on the part of the Queen. Within the borough he had neglected his constituents, ignored their concerns and failed even to attend meetings to select his running-mate. Both the Woolwich and Deptford Dockyards had closed in 1869 and, although this had been initiated earlier by a Tory administration, there had been a widespread and successful campaign to apportion blame to the Liberals as a whole and Gladstone personally. Resentment expressed by Dissenters towards clause 25 of the 1873 Education Act—which allowed the worrying combination of compulsory education and governmental funding of Church schools—led to a 'dignified policy of abstention' amongst the borough's usually Liberal Dissenting communities.¹⁰³ The cumulative impact of these factors is shown in that not a single non-conformist minister voted.¹⁰⁴ The *Kentish Mercury* exploited these fears, and ignoring the fact that Boord was both a partner in a large distilling firm and was able to draw support from the Association of Licensed Victuallers, which controlled the votes of nearly 400 publicans, claimed:

War upon religion is the battle cry of the new party, whether they direct their assaults against the Church or the Schools. [And that] In such a contest Christian men must needs be Conservatives.¹⁰⁵

The Roman Catholic clergy went even further with Father Fannan, of St Joseph's, Deptford, advising his congregation they should vote for Angerstein, whom he considered a religious man, rather than the Unitarian, Langley.¹⁰⁶ These political drawbacks, combined with the Liberals proposing two rival candidates, created a constant undermining of Langley's campaign. On 2 August the votes were counted, with the results being:

Boord (C)	4525
Langley (L)	2379
Angerstein (L)	. . .	1063

Bennett (L)	324
Coningsby (LC)	30
Pook (C)	27 ¹⁰⁷

The by-election had been less a Tory victory than a Liberal defeat. In 1868 the Tory candidate Sir Henry Parker had received 4,704 votes, whilst in 1873 Boord received only 4,525, or 179 votes fewer. Conversely, in 1868 there had been 6,684 Liberal votes cast, but by 1873 this had fallen to a combined total of just 3,766. While the number of electors fluctuated between the two elections these figures suggest that 2,918 former Liberal electors had simply declined to vote.¹⁰⁸ Although Liberal electors had decreased in number the majority of those who voted had supported Langley.¹⁰⁹ And while he had failed to reach Parliament, he had gained more than twice as many votes as the official Liberal candidate; a considerable achievement. In fact, rather than view the result as a defeat, Langley saw it as a call to arms. Having secured more than twice the votes of his moderate rival, all that was needed was to ensure all potential Liberal voters were registered before the next contest. On 16 August, he published a letter in the *Chronicle*:

To the brave and faithful 2,379. I again tender my thanks. There is no time for compliments, however. We must prepare for action. Another election will occur next year. We must secure a good position on the field, and THE BATTLE FIELD IS THE REGISTER. Let every earnest Radical make it his duty to see that his own name and that of every duly qualified neighbour is placed upon the register. If this work be diligently done before the 25th (Monday Week) we can secure an easy victory.¹¹⁰

Barely four months after the by-election, Gladstone unexpectedly dissolved Parliament. An election date for Greenwich was set for 4 February 1874 (although other constituencies would head to the polls from as early as 31 January, to as late as 17 February). Several reasons have been suggested for this, the most likely being that, having accepted the post of Chancellor of the Exchequer on 11 August 1873 and in keeping with established tradition, Gladstone was facing legal calls for a second by-election in Greenwich, which he risked losing.¹¹¹ Between Gladstone's unpopularity within the borough and the recent loss of the companion seat to Boord, his likelihood of success in such a contest was indeed highly doubtful. By calling a General Election he denied the Opposition sufficient time to mount an effective campaign against him. But

his failure to visit his supposed electorate did little to endear him to his constituents. The *Kentish Mercury* decried it as a *coup d'état* from a member who had 'flagitiously neglected the interests of his constituents and treated them with contempt'.¹¹² Langley again stood, and this time there was an attempt to illustrate the hypocrisy of Boord, who as a wealthy distiller openly received the support of the brewing industry, and also of the local religious authorities. Placards were posted around the area, 'Vote for Boord, Gin, Misery, Crime and Sunday Desecration'.¹¹³ Questions were immediately asked by Langley and his supporters, and allegations raised that the hastily organised polls failed to facilitate adequately the participation of working men. At Crescent Road, Plumstead, for example, local workers had grown so frustrated with the delays that they forced an entrance through the wall of the polling station. Despite this action, at 4pm the presiding officer had declared the office closed, leaving 100 men with their votes uncounted. Outside the building many more were turned away despite having waited for more than two hours.¹¹⁴

Once again, the election ended in a partial defeat for the Liberal Party. When the result was declared, the Conservatives topped the poll:

Boord (C) 6193
 Gladstone (L) . . . 5968
 Liardet (C). 5561
 Langley (L) . . . 5255¹¹⁵

Although Gladstone had defended his seat successfully, he took little pleasure in having done so and gave the people of Greenwich little appreciation for their loyalty: 'My own election for Greenwich after Boord the distiller is more like a defeat than a victory, though it places me in parliament again.'¹¹⁶

For Langley, the defeat was a grave disappointment. In the four months since the previous election he had doubled his voting base but had failed once again to gain a seat. Financially the campaigning was becoming unsustainable and after the contest Langley received a bill from the returning officer for the sum of £1,080 18s.¹¹⁷ Although the moderates had not put up a candidate against him on this occasion, they had remained determined to undermine his campaign. An analysis of the votes suggested that many moderate Liberals had voted for Gladstone but had cast their second ballot for Boord, rather than for Langley.¹¹⁸

But it was not just Greenwich that had seen a Conservative success. There was a sweeping majority for Disraeli throughout the country despite the Liberals winning the majority of the popular vote.¹¹⁹ Combining England and Wales the

Tory majority stood at 105 seats; in Great Britain as a whole at eighty-three. To add to the calamity, in Ireland—despite Gladstone’s reforms—of 105 members, the Liberals gained little more than a dozen (the remainder being declared ‘Home Rule’ candidates). It had been an emphatic rejection of Liberalism and of Gladstone. Langley had merely been part of that loss but had the consolation of knowing that when the political mood shifted back to favour Liberalism, he could expect a more favourable result. He had become, through hard work and a genuine interest in the locals’ needs and aspirations, the acknowledged leading Liberal candidate. He had steadily increased his base of support and garnered more than twice the votes of his last moderate rival. With the backing of the Advanced Liberals, and of the *Gazette*, he could reasonably have expected to reap the rewards of his campaigning at some future election. To do so, however, would require considerable financial resources. It was in this pursuit of parliamentary election that he was to meet his downfall.

Notes

- 1 ‘Mr Angerstein M.P., at Deptford’, *Kentish Mercury*, 28 January 1865.
- 2 *Ibid.*
- 3 ‘Splitting the Party’, *Greenwich and Deptford Chronicle and Woolwich Gazette*, 5 April 1873; Edward Royle, *Radicals, Secularists and Republicans: Popular Freethought in Britain, 1866–1915* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980) p. 104; David M. George, ‘The Plumstead Common Riots of 1876: A Study in Mid-Victorian Protest’, *The London Journal*, vol. 36, no. 3, 2011, pp. 195–210.
- 4 William Gardiner, ‘Discussion-Class Liberalism and Mr. Angerstein’, *Kentish Mercury*, 4 February 1865.
- 5 Geoffrey Crossick, *An Artisan Elite in Victorian Society: Kentish London, 1840–1880* (London: Croom Helm, 1978) p. 214.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 217.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 214.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 217.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 218.
- 10 ‘Mr. Angerstein M.P., at Deptford’, *Kentish Mercury*, 28 January 1865.
- 11 ‘Oldham—Public Tea Party and Ball in Honour of W. J. Fox, Esq.’, *Manchester Times*, 2 October 1852; ‘District News—Oldham Election’, *Ibid.*, 7 August 1852.
- 12 ‘Purity of Election’, *Stockport Mercury*, 17 June 1852.
- 13 ‘Our Election—Final Issue’, *ibid.*, 17 December 1847.
- 14 ‘Oldham—Public Tea Party and Ball in Honour of W. J. Fox, Esq.’, *Manchester Times*, 2 October 1852; ‘Oldham Election’, *Manchester Times*, 7 August 1852.

- 15 'District News—Blackburn Election', *Manchester Times*, 26 March 1853.
- 16 'The Blackburn Riots Continue to Yield Their Practical Warnings', *The Times*, 31 March 1853; 'The Riots at Blackburn', *ibid.*
- 17 The use of the military to control such disturbances was becoming increasingly frequent. See, for example, David Kent, 'Containing Disorder in the 'Age of Equipoise: Troops, Trains and the Telegraph', *Social History*, vol. 38, no. 3, 2013, pp. 308–27.
- 18 'District News—Blackburn Election', *Manchester Times*, 26 March 1853; 'The Blackburn Election—More Rioting', *Ibid.*, 30 March 1853.
- 19 'To the Electors of the Borough of Greenwich', *Kentish Mercury*, 1 April 1865; Mark Patton, *Science, Politics and Business in the Work of Sir John Lubbock* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2013) pp. 75–76. This proved to be a mistake. Lubbock, a talented archaeologist, had recently published a work—*Prehistoric Times*—which introduced a Darwinian view of human development. This had outraged the clergy and many parishioners, who voted en masse for his Tory opponents. It was enough to swing what was expected to be a Liberal victory into a defeat, the Conservative Viscount Holmsdale and Baronet, Sir William Hart-Dyke being elected.
- 20 Edward Brasilford Bright and Sir Charles Tilston Bright, *The Life of Sir Charles Tilston Bright, Civil Engineer, With Which is Incorporated the Story of the Atlantic Cable, and the First Telegraph to India and the Colonies* (London: A. Constable & Co., 1908) pp. 265–73.
- 21 A. C. Lynch, 'Bright, Sir Charles Tilston', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) online <www.oxforddnb.com.library.sl.nsw.gov.au/view/article/3415> [accessed 11 October 2013].
- 22 'Representation of Greenwich', *Morning Post*, 8 June 1865.
- 23 Crossick, *Artisan Elite*, p. 214; 'Sir Charles Bright at Woolwich', *Kentish Mercury*, 17 June 1865.
- 24 'Alderman Salomons M.P., on the Reform Question', *Daily News*, 18 January 1867; 'Sir J. H. Maxwell Bart., and the representation of Greenwich', *Kentish Mercury*, 1 July 1865; Charles Mosley (ed.), *Burke's Peerage, Baronetage and Knightage* (107th edn), vol. 2 (London: Burke's Peerage Genealogical Books Ltd, 2003) p. 1,514.
- 25 'Greenwich', *The Times*, 8 July 1865; 'Borough of Greenwich Election', *Kentish Mercury*, 8 July 1865.
- 26 'Sir Charles Bright at Woolwich', *Kentish Mercury*, 17 June 1865.
- 27 William Gardiner, 'Discussion Class Liberalism and Mr. Angerstein', *Kentish Mercury*, 4 February 1865. In fairness, the author of this letter, William Gardiner, was later to alter his position and become an outspoken supporter of the radical movement within Greenwich.
- 28 *Address of Capt. Douglas Harris to the Electors of the Borough of Greenwich*, 31 May 1865, Greenwich Heritage Centre/Elections: Parliamentary Folder/Capt Douglas Harris.

- 29 J. Baxter Langley, 'Election Intelligence—Greenwich', *Daily News*, 11 July 1865.
- 30 Sir J. H. Maxwell, 'Election Intelligence—Greenwich', *Daily News*, 11 July 1865; Captain Douglas Harris, 'The Candidature of Captain Harris', *Kentish Mercury*, 15 July 1865.
- 31 Editor, 'The Candidature of Captain Harris', *Kentish Mercury*, 15 July 1865.
- 32 J. Baxter Langley, 'Letter to the Editor of the *Kentish Mercury*', *Kentish Mercury*, 22 August 1868.
- 33 'Election Intelligence', *Daily News*, 11 July 1865.
- 34 'Greenwich', *The Times*, 11 July 1865; 'Election Intelligence', *Morning Post*, 11 July 1865.
- 35 David Salomons, *To the Electors or the Borough of Greenwich* (Leaflet), 12 July 1865.
- 36 J. Baxter Langley, Letter to Consul Thomas Haines Dudley, 13 July 1865, DU2545.
- 37 Crossick, *Artisan Elite*, p. 214.
- 38 'Reform Meeting at Greenwich', *Daily News*, 2 May 1867; 'The Irish Question and the Electors of Greenwich', *Freeman's Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser*, 4 February 1868.
- 39 Ann Saab, *Reluctant Icon: Gladstone, Bulgaria, and the Working-Classes, 1856–1878* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1991) p. 175. This was probably the radical Josiah J. Merriman, a member of Marx's First International.
- 40 'The Explosion at Woolwich', *Morning Post*, 30 October 1867; 'The Explosion at Woolwich Arsenal', *Morning Post*, 14 November 1867.
- 41 'The Government Reform Bill', *Daily News*, Thursday, 12 April 1866; *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, 9 June 1867; *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, 22 September 1867; A Member of Mr Langley's Electoral Committee, *A Brief Biography of J. Baxter Langley, M.R.C.S. & F.L.S. Together with Some of his Speeches Delivered in Greenwich, Deptford, & Woolwich in the Year 1866* (London: Riley & Couchman, 1867).
- 42 'Notes from the Metropolis', *Leicester Chronicle and the Leicestershire Mercury*, 11 July 1868.
- 43 'Sir C. T. Bright, M.P.', *Kentish Mercury*, 10 October 1868; Bright, *Sir Charles Tilston Bright*, p. 301.
- 44 John Sweetman, 'Codrington, Sir William John (1804–1884)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004), January 2011 <www.oxforddnb.com.library.sl.nsw.gov.au/view/article/5800> [accessed 29 November 2013]; J. Baxter Langley, 'Letter From J. Baxter Langley', *Kentish Mercury*, 29 August 1868.
- 45 'Mr. Gladstone and Greenwich', *Reynold's Newspaper*, 13 December 1868.
- 46 W.C. Bennett, who was later to work extensively with Langley, was a hugely popular poet of the period. Largely forgotten now, his works included 'Baby May and Other Poems on Infants' and 'Songs for Sailors'.

- 47 'Mr. Baxter Langley and Mr. Gladstone', *Preston Guardian*, 11 July 1868.
- 48 'Greenwich', *Daily News*, 16 July 1868.
- 49 'Mr. Gladstone for Greenwich', *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, 12 July 1868; 'Greenwich', *Daily News*, 16 July 1868; 'Summary of this Morning's News', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 17 September 1868.
- 50 'Mr. Gladstone and the Borough of Greenwich', *Sheffield and Rotherham Independent*, 26 November 1868.
- 51 'Mr. Gladstone and his New Constituency', *York Herald*, 28 November 1868.
- 52 'Borough of Greenwich Election—Declaration of the Poll', *Kentish Mercury*, 21 November 1868.
- 53 The rule is explained in Roy Jenkins, *Gladstone: A Biography* (New York: Random House, 1997) p. 147.
- 54 Barbara Ludlow, 'Vote, vote, vote for ??????—A Brief History of the Parliamentary Borough of Greenwich' (Unpublished Thesis, Dip. Loc. History: Goldsmith's College, University of London, n.d.), Greenwich Heritage Centre/ Elections: Parliamentary Elections 1865/Parliamentary History of Greenwich, p. 45.
- 55 'The newspapers are in all directions', *Kentish Mercury*, 12 September 1868.
- 56 'Latest Election Movements—Greenwich', *Daily News*, 21 November 1868; 'William Angerstein, Greenwich Election—To the Editor of the *Daily News*', *Daily News*, 25 November 1868.
- 57 'Latest Election Movements—Greenwich', *Daily News*, 21 November 1868.
- 58 'Greenwich', *Bradford Observer*, 22 December 1868.
- 59 . 'Dockyard Cooperation Meeting on Plumstead Common', *Greenwich and Deptford Chronicle and Woolwich Gazette*, 24 July 1869; 'Deptford Cooperative Movement', *Greenwich and Deptford Chronicle and Woolwich Gazette*, 31 July 1869; 'The Deptford Co-operative Movement', *Greenwich and Deptford Chronicle and Woolwich Gazette*, 14 August 1868; 'Deptford Co-operative Association', *Greenwich and Deptford Chronicle and Woolwich Gazette*, 21 August 1869; 'Deptford Co Operative [sic] Shipbuilding and Repairing Society', *Greenwich and Deptford Chronicle and Woolwich Gazette*, 2 October 1869. This organisation was given a number of names by the *Chronicle*.
- 60 House of Commons Debate, 31 May 1870 vol. 201, cc1715-40, online <
- 61 'The Revivers' Association', *Greenwich and Deptford Chronicle and Woolwich Gazette*, 14 August 1869.
- 62 'The Woolwich Liberal Association', *Greenwich and Deptford Chronicle and Woolwich Gazette*, 21 June 1873.
- 63 'Dr Langley's Meeting', *Greenwich and Deptford Chronicle and Woolwich Gazette*, 24 May 1873; 'Dr Langley's Candidature (editorial)', *Ibid.*, 24 May 1873.
- 64 Crossick, *Artisan Elite*, p. 222.
- 65 'Borough of Greenwich Advanced Liberal Association', *Greenwich and Deptford Chronicle and Woolwich Gazette*, 31 July 1869.

- 66 'Advanced Liberal Association', *Greenwich and Deptford Chronicle and Woolwich Gazette*, 15 January 1870.
- 67 'Summary of News—Sir Henry Storks', *Sheffield and Rotherham Independent*, 26 October 1870; 'Advanced Liberal Association', *Greenwich and Deptford Chronicle and Woolwich Gazette*, 12 February 1870.
- 68 'The Premier and his Constituents', *The Times*, 3 January 1871.
- 69 'The Greenwich Electors and Mr Gladstone', *The Times*, 10 January 1871; 'Mr. Gladstone and Greenwich', *The Times*, 16 January 1871.
- 70 *Ibid.*
- 71 'Mr. Gladstone and Greenwich', *The Times*, 9 January 1871.
- 72 'The Norwich Election Trail', *Bradford Observer*, 9 January 1871.
- 73 'The Greenwich Electors and Mr Gladstone', *The Times*, 10 January 1871; 'Mr Gladstone and his Constituents', *Bradford Observer*, 10 January 1871.
- 74 J. Baxter Langley, 'Mr Gladstone and Greenwich', *The Times*, 9 January 1871.
- 75 'The Greenwich Electors and Mr Gladstone', *The Times*, 10 January 1871.
- 76 'The Greenwich Electors and Mr Gladstone', *The Times*, 10 January 1871; 'Mr Gladstone and Greenwich', *The Times*, 16 January 1871.
- 77 E.I. Carlyle, 'Bennett, William Cox (1820–1895)', Rev. H.C.G. Matthew (ed.), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) <www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.sl.nsw.gov.au/view/article/2128> [accessed 2 December 2013].
- 78 'Mr Gladstone and Greenwich', *The Times*, 16 January 1871.
- 79 'The Authors of the Requisition calling on Mr Gladstone to Resign', *The Times*, 17 January 1871; 'Mr Gladstone and his Constituents', *The Times*, 17 January 1871.
- 80 'Dr J. Baxter Langley's Address', *Greenwich and Deptford Chronicle and Woolwich Gazette*, 3 May 1873.
- 81 'Presentation to the Publisher of the Chronicle and Gazette', *Greenwich and Deptford Chronicle and Woolwich Gazette*, 4 December 1869.
- 82 *Ibid.*
- 83 'The Rival Lawyer's Broadside', *Greenwich and Deptford Chronicle and Woolwich Gazette*, 15 January 1870.
- 84 'Presentation to the Publisher of the "Chronicle" and "Gazette"', *Greenwich and Deptford Chronicle and Woolwich Gazette*, 4 December 1869.
- 85 'Proposed Liberal Electoral Association', *Greenwich and Deptford Chronicle and Woolwich Gazette*, 22 February 1873.
- 86 'Great Liberal Meeting at Woolwich', *Greenwich and Deptford Chronicle and Woolwich Gazette*, 1 March 1873.
- 87 'Great Liberal Meeting at Woolwich', *Greenwich and Deptford Chronicle and Woolwich Gazette*, 1 March 1873.
- 88 William Angerstein, 'Great Liberal Meeting at Woolwich', *Greenwich and Deptford Chronicle and Woolwich Gazette*, 1 March 1873.

- 89 Ibid.
- 90 'Dr Langley's Meeting', *Greenwich and Deptford Chronicle and Woolwich Gazette*, 24 May 1873. Such matters were of particular relevance, as in 1871 and 1873 Liberal MP Edward Miall had brought forwards a bill for the disestablishment of the Church of England. Defeated on both occasions, both Gladstone and Salomons had opposed it.
- 91 J. Baxter Langley, 'Great Liberal Meeting at Woolwich', *Greenwich and Deptford Chronicle and Woolwich Gazette*, 1 March 1873.
- 92 Ibid.
- 93 Ibid.
- 94 'Letter from J. Baxter Langley', *Greenwich and Deptford Chronicle and Woolwich Gazette*, 26 July 1873.
- 95 'The Nomination of Candidates', *Greenwich and Deptford Chronicle and Woolwich Gazette*, 2 August 1873.
- 96 Ibid., 11 October 1873. The full amounts were Boord £2,061 15s 9d; Angerstein £1,928 18s 9d; Langley £436 15s 11d; and Pook £305 0s 6d. Coningsby and Bennett gave no returns for the campaign.
- 97 'The Nomination of Candidates', *Greenwich and Deptford Chronicle and Woolwich Gazette*, 2 August 1873.
- 98 J. Baxter Langley, 'Representation of Greenwich', Ibid., 26 July 1873.
- 99 T.W. Boord, 'To the Electors of the Borough of Greenwich', *Greenwich and Deptford Chronicle and Woolwich Gazette*, 2 August 1873.
- 100 'Dr Langley at Greenwich', Ibid., 2 August 1873; 'Dr Baxter Langley at Woolwich—On Monday Evening', Ibid., 2 August 1873.
- 101 T.W. Boord, 'To the Electors of the Borough of Greenwich', *Greenwich and Deptford Chronicle and Woolwich Gazette*, 2 August 1873; 'Dr J. Baxter Langley: Secularist, Republican, Home Ruler', *Kentish Mercury*, 26 July 1873. Emphasis in original.
- 102 Chris Cook, *The Longman Companion to Britain in the Nineteenth Century, 1815–1914* (London: Longman, 1999) p. 175.
- 103 'Nonconformists and Greenwich Election', *Northern Echo*, 7 August 1873.
- 104 Ibid.
- 105 'The Disorganised Liberal Party', *Kentish Mercury*, 21 June 1873; S.A. Pilgrim, Honourable Secretary of the Blackheath Division of the Licensed Victuallers' and Beer sellers' Society, 'The Licensed Victuallers and the Candidates', *Greenwich and Deptford Chronicle and Woolwich Gazette*, 26 August 1873; 'The Licensed Victuallers and Mr Boord', *Kentish Mercury*, 2 August 1873.
- 106 'Catholic Priests and Catholic Voters', *Greenwich and Deptford Chronicle and Woolwich Gazette*, 16 August 1873; 'General News—Greenwich Election', *The Tablet—International Catholic News Weekly*, 18 October 1873; 'The Late Greenwich Election—To the Editor of *The Tablet*', *The Tablet—International Catholic News Weekly*, 18 October 1873.

- 107 'Election Intelligence—The Declaration of the Poll at Greenwich', *Daily News*, 5 August 1873.
- 108 'The Recent Defeat', *Greenwich and Deptford Chronicle and Woolwich Gazette*, 9 August 1873.
- 109 *Ibid.*
- 110 J. Baxter Langley, 'To the Electors of the Borough of Greenwich', *Greenwich and Deptford Chronicle and Woolwich Gazette*, 15 August 1873.
- 111 William Henry Maehl, 'Gladstone, the Liberals, and the Election of 1874', *Historical Research*, vol. 36, no. 93, first published online October 2007, p. 56. Gladstone had certainly been advised by the Lord Chancellor, Roundell Palmer, that 'I do not see how it can be denied, that, by the acceptance of the Chancellor of the Exchequer your seat for Greenwich became *ipso facto* vacant'.
- 112 'To the Conservatives of Greenwich', *Kentish Mercury*, 31 January 1874.
- 113 'Incidents of the Polling', *Kentish Mercury*, 7 February 1874.
- 114 'Incidents of the Polling', *Kentish Mercury*, 7 February 1874.
- 115 *Ibid.*
- 116 W.E. Gladstone, quoted in John Morley, *The Life of William Ewart Gladstone* (1903), vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) p. 490.
- 117 'The Greenwich Election Bill', *Greenwich and Deptford Chronicle and Woolwich Gazette*, 4 October 1874.
- 118 'The Radicals and the Late Election', *Kentish Mercury*, 14 February 1874.
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Housing the Working Classes, 1870–1877

During the course of Langley's political career, it became increasingly obvious that housing, and in particular housing for the poor, could no longer be left entirely to the vagaries of the free market. The advent of industrialised working practices had engendered a concentration of the populace in overcrowded, and often chronically unsanitary, metropolitan communities. In 1801 the combined population of England and Wales was 9 million, of which only a third lived in an urban environment. By 1871 this had risen to 23.7 million, with the majority living in the ever-expanding manufacturing towns and ports.¹ Between 1801 and 1871 the population of Manchester and Salford increased from 89,000, in round figures, to 476,000. Other cities that Langley knew well burgeoned: in the same period Preston went from 12,000 to 85,000; Stockport from 17,000 to 53,000; and Newcastle from 33,000 to 128,000. London, already huge in 1801, increased from under a million to 3.25 million.² The sheer magnitude of this growth made attempts to provide housing inadequate, resulting in overcrowding, unsanitary conditions and disease.³ Such conditions resulted in huge differences in life expectancy—as late as 1861 the life expectancy for males residing in Liverpool was only 26. In the rural environment of Okehampton, Devon, it was as high as 57.⁴ Of particular concern to Victorian sensibilities was the fact that many working-class homes consisted of members of more than one family, making overcrowding a moral—as well as a sanitary—issue.⁵

The alien world of the urban poor became a popular literary topic for the entertainment and education of a wider middle-class readership, with contributions from sources as diverse as the Salvation Army's William Booth and the communist Friedrich Engels. This genre peaked twice with the publication of Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor* in 1851 and the 1883 work *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London* by Andrew Mearns.⁶ As Mayhew argued:

Few who will read these pages have any conception of what these pestilential human rookeries are, where tens of thousands are crowded together amidst horrors which call to mind what we have heard of the middle passages of the slave ship.⁷

Langley was undoubtedly aware of the condition of the poor and as early as 1860 the *Newcastle Daily Chronicle* had carried his scathing descriptions of the slum housing endured by the Burradon mining community.⁸ He had advocated the building and use of Turkish baths, including enhanced access for women, and when he stood for Parliament in 1865 the upgrading of sanitation within the borough of Greenwich had been one of the pillars of his platform.⁹

Langley's concern with housing reform was to culminate in his Chairmanship of the Artizans, Labourers' and General Dwellings Company (AL&GDC). This was part of the 'philanthropy and five per cent' movement which sought to combine the altruism of charitable institutions with the self-interest necessary to attract capitalist financing.¹⁰ The first of these, the Metropolitan Association for Improving the Dwellings of the Industrious Classes, had been founded in 1841.¹¹ This was followed closely by the Society for Improving the Conditions of the Labouring Classes in 1844.¹² By the end of the century there were thirty such companies in London alone. Under Langley's influence the AL&GDC was to grow to become the largest and most effective of these.

Supposedly established by 'a very modest group of clerks and working men', the AL&GDC had, in reality, been founded by *former* workingmen who had moved upwards in terms of both financial and social respectability.¹³ William Austin, the most prominent of these, had been an agricultural labourer, but by 1867—the year of the company's founding—was a successful drainage contractor and a speculative builder. Also involved were John Shaw Lowe (an ex-commercial traveller) and William Swindlehurst (1824–1891) (an engineer and one-time employee of the Chartist Land Company). The company had a clear set of goals:

To assist the working classes to obtain improved dwellings, erected from the best materials at the lowest possible cost, to become owners of the houses they occupy; to raise their position in the social scale; to spread a moral influence over their class, tending to foster habits of industry, sobriety and frugality.¹⁴

But it also made no secret of its intention return a healthy profit: 'We make no pretensions to benevolence, charity, or cant of that kind. The scheme pays all parties; the helpers and the helped are alike benefited.'¹⁵

The AL&GDC provided unique and cost-effective working-class accommodation in several ways. First, while building societies required a substantial deposit before construction could begin, the AL&GDC, recognising that such stipulations excluded many aspirants, built houses without such preconditions. Instead, it used shareholders' capital to purchase land, construct as many homes as it could afford, and only then sought occupants. These would take possession of the property either as renters or, preferably, as mortgage holders.¹⁶ Although the latter was more costly it was only marginally so, and the company aimed to charge rents considerably lower than those of the surrounding district.¹⁷ Once mortgage payments had covered the expense of construction, and provided a healthy dividend to shareholders, ownership of the building passed to the lessee. This was estimated to take, on average, fifteen years. Similarly, the AL&GDC, unlike building societies, did not penalise for missed payments, instituting only a five per cent surcharge. This made defaulting on a loan due to unemployment, illness or other adverse circumstances far less likely to occur.

By 1869 Austin had been voted off the board and William John Bennett replaced him as Chairman of the company. This appears to have been only a temporary appointment, however, and Langley was elected to take his place on 17 July 1870. Both Langley and his new colleague William Swindlehurst had connections to Preston: Swindlehurst was a native of Preston and had been employed by the Preston branch of the Chartist Land Company, while Langley was editor of the *Preston Guardian*.¹⁸ It is likely, therefore, that it was through this acquaintance that Langley became involved with the AL&GDC. Austin's exodus had not been voluntary, and he seemed to bear considerable resentment towards his successor Bennett and the other Directors. He was to lament later, 'I was too honest for them, and it was for this reason that they hunted me out'.¹⁹ There seems to have been some truth in this statement: one of Langley's first actions was to oversee Bennett's dismissal from the company.²⁰ By this time working in Salford as an AL&GDC Building Supervisor, Bennett had been surreptitiously 'taking contracts for house construction, providing materials and at the same time working as a building supervisor for the company'.²¹ Moreover, local carpenters testified that Bennett spent all his available time overseeing the construction of his own properties. These matters had come to light when contractors installed the wrong size of plumbing and gas piping; Bennett had not only failed to notice this mistake but had also paid the workmen for a job well done. Having taken the Chairmanship of the company Langley asserted his authority immediately, dismissed Bennett and threatened to

commence legal proceedings in order 'to prevent any further such nefarious proceedings'.²² A clearly chastised Bennett wrote a letter to Langley offering to sell back his remaining interests in the company as he 'did not feel comfortable to be connected with a company after such a marked want of confidence'.²³

Once appointed as Chairman Langley initiated sweeping changes to the company. Before his arrival the AL&GDC had attempted to amass funding for its projects through the participation of working-class stockholders. These, it was hoped, would purchase shares in order to become owner-occupiers. Shares in the company were £10 each, although initially, only £1 of this was called up. It was further hoped that a sufficient number of tenant shareholders would have a background in the building trade to make outside contractors unnecessary.²⁴ Although socially admirable this proved impractical. Most working-class investors purchased only a single share and a failure to pay calls on capital meant many of these were subsequently forfeited. A series of letters published in the *Manchester Examiner*—from 'Unfortunate' and others—accused the company of false advertising when 'a great domestic affliction' had resulted in just such a situation.²⁵ This lack of investment had severely handicapped the company's ability to build. Able to construct small blocks of housing in Landseer and Rollo Streets, Battersea, sufficient funding for larger projects remained unattainable.

Recognising this weakness Langley abandoned the policy and instead sought to 'strengthen the share list of the company'.²⁶ Within weeks of his appointment the AL&GDC had placed advertisements in Tory-aligned newspapers such as *The Times* and the *Daily Telegraph*.²⁷ This alteration in policy was immediately supported by Swindlehurst, who shortly afterwards penned a pamphlet, which, 'If issued to the higher class of investors for whom it is intended he had not the least doubt it would be productive of much good to the company.'²⁸ It was to prove a successful strategy. Under Langley's Chairmanship the invested capital rose from £3,000 at the end of 1869, to almost £400,000 by the end of 1875.²⁹ Deposit accounts, acquired from working-class tenants, also rose but at a much slower rate. In 1869, they had amounted to £4,745 and by 1875 had risen to £62,334. This was a clear vindication of Langley's policy on investment and allowed the company to expand into major construction works.

In 1872, Langley chaired a meeting of the Directors to discuss the purchase of a large area of land around Battersea.³⁰ Known as 'Shaftesbury Park' this 40-acre property, originally a farm, had been acquired in 1867 by the developer James Lord, but in 1872 had been sold on to Miles Stringer, a former

dragoon officer, for £30,000.³¹ By the time that Langley expressed an interest the price had dropped to £28,000.³² This, according to a survey commissioned by the company, was considerably below market value. To add to the estate's attractiveness, road construction had already commenced and was to be completed before the sale. Far more ambitious than anything the company had previously attempted this was exactly the sort of large-scale building project that Langley had envisaged. Plans were drawn up immediately for the construction of 1,191 houses. Negotiations clearly favoured the AL&GDC, as it was an offer of only £25,000—rather than £28,000—that was accepted.³³ Edward Saffrey, the estate agent who had arranged the sale, was paid a further £3,000 for facilitating the purchase. It was later found that he had donated a percentage of this commission back to the Directors in appreciation for their patronage.³⁴ Such methods were employed by the company not only for the Shaftesbury Estate, but also for later purchases in Westminster and in Wanstead, North-East London. Although uncertain in legal terms, they enabled the company to move quickly and in the case of the Shaftesbury Estate to secure a remarkably shrewd purchase.³⁵ Other companies were developing around the area and the land was soon to greatly increase in value.

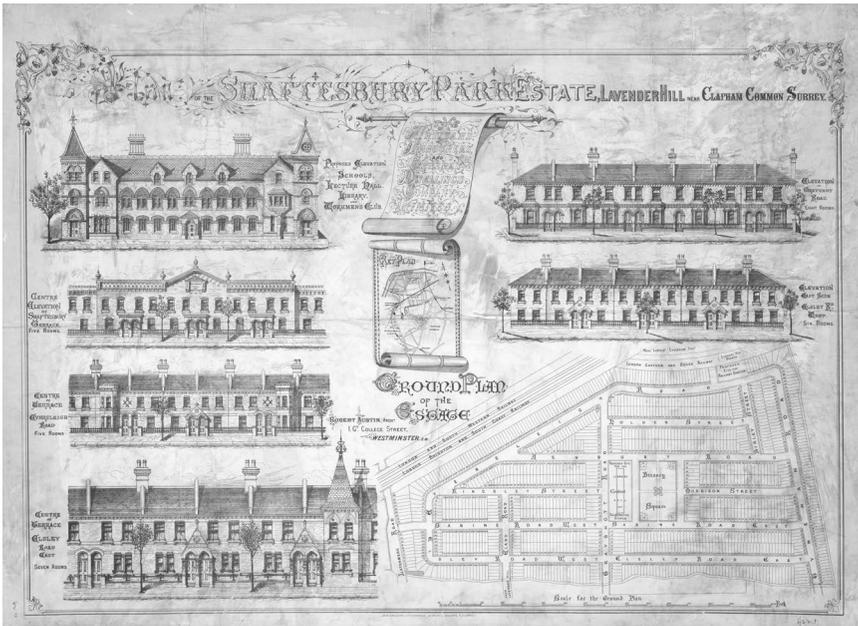


Figure 17: Sandringham Estate, 1874. Shaftesbury Park Estate Plans, Lavender Hill, Artizans, Labourers and General Dwellings Company (Albert and Shelly Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia).

The acquisition of Shaftesbury Park was intended by Langley to be a profit-making venture, and the company was soon paying dividends of between 5 per cent and 7.5 per cent to investors.³⁶ But the standard of houses built was clear evidence of a concurrent social awareness. Purchase prices ranged from £170 for a five-bedroom house, to £310 for one of eight rooms, and rents from 5s 9d to 10s per week. Though not overly spacious, and mostly built without either attics or basements, each was supplied with cupboards, wallpaper, shelves and window blinds.³⁷ But what separated the Shaftesbury Park houses from those built by the many other 'improved housing' companies was the determination also to provide a beneficial and pleasant civic environment. The outside of the newly built homes possessed decorative stone arches and eaves, and many of their entrances boasted handsome projecting canopies. Lime and plane trees adorned the wide roadsides, and a large garden area complete with bandstand was planned. To be known as Brassey Square, this was almost certainly Langley's suggestion, and would have provided both open space and a symbolic civic centre for the estate's residents.³⁸ Adjoining this was a site reserved for the construction by the London School Board of the Holden Street School, a lecture hall capable of housing 800 people, a library and a co-operative store.³⁹ True to both Austin and Swindlehurst's original temperance ideals, no public houses or beer shops were granted licences within the Estate.⁴⁰

A further advantage enjoyed by the AL&GDC was that, as the sole company involved in construction, an improved method of drainage could be employed with an integrated sewage system. This avoided the common, and unsanitary, problem of substrata leakage.⁴¹ But by utilising such a ground-breaking approach, the AL&GDC ran into conflict with the more conservative local government. The Wandsworth Board of Works refused authorisation, and even threatened legal action against the company unless it reverted to a more traditional system. For Langley this was a matter of principle and although it would undoubtedly have been easier to simply build inferior houses he stood firm, refused to abandon the scheme and initiated a counter-suit against the Wandsworth Board. When the higher authority of the Metropolitan Board of Works intervened, Langley's stand was vindicated. The board's surveyor's report concluded:

The back drainage system as proposed is in every respect the best. It is the most simple to excavate, is easy and inexpensive to maintain and upon the point of public health is in my opinion much superior to the system of draining under each house from front to back, which is usually the case in the metropolis where there are separate ownerships.⁴²



Figure 18: A contemporary view of the Shaftesbury Estate, originally published in *The Graphic*, 28 November 1874 (Temple, 'Shaftesbury Estate', in *Survey of London*, p. 258).

This attention to detail was unusual, even amongst charitable or 'philanthropy and five per cent' companies. The Improved Industrial Dwellings Company, for example, built a multi-story block known as the 'Sandringham' near Charing Cross in 1888, which clearly represented a very different, less community-based approach.

For those living in such estates these considerations were more than aesthetic; they were often a matter of life and death. In 1875 the *Journal of the Statistical Society of London* published figures gathered from 1867 to 1874. The importance of companies such as Langley's AL&GDC was clearly displayed.



Figure 19: View of Sandringham Flats from Charing Cross Road, 1972 (London Metropolitan Archives, #002697).

Whilst mortality rates within the capital generally exceeded twenty-four per 1,000, within 'improved housing' it was fewer than fourteen per 1,000.⁴³ In 1873 Langley was able to further boast that within AL&GDC homes mortality reached only six per 1,000.⁴⁴ Even allowing for the careful vetting of tenants, the company accepted this this remained an impressive difference.⁴⁵

The prestige that the company enjoyed under Langley's management was clearly visible when the Shaftesbury Park Estate was opened formally on 18 July 1874.⁴⁶ In attendance were Francis Richard Charteris, Lord Elcho (1818–1914), Thomas George Anson, second Earl of Lichfield (1825–1892) and Anthony Ashley-Cooper, seventh Earl of Shaftesbury (1801–1885)—all of whom were official Arbiters for the firm—and Shaftesbury's son, Evelyn Ashley MP (1836–1907), who was a newly appointed Director.⁴⁷ Most significant was the presence of the Prime Minister, Benjamin Disraeli, who told an enthusiastic crowd:

I look upon the movement myself with great interest, because this subject at this moment excites and occupies the attention of Parliament. You have to a certain degree solved a question which has perplexed Parliaments.⁴⁸

Having thus succeeded with the ambitious, socially admirable and commercially profitable Shaftesbury project, Langley sought further to expand the influence of the AL&GDC. On 6 May 1874, he read to his fellow executives a valuation for the Harrow Park Estate in West London.⁴⁹ This consisted of 63 acres of freehold land, sufficient for the construction of nearly 2,400 homes. Serviced by both an omnibus route and the nearby Westbourne Park Railway Station, the land also bordered the popular areas of Notting Hill, Kilburn Park, the Edgware Road and Bayswater. The site was particularly suitable as the estate faced the Grand Junction Canal, facilitating the easy importation of construction materials. In short, the report concluded:

It is a valuable building estate and particularly eligible for the construction of artisans' dwellings and I am of the opinion it can be secured for anything under £1,000 an acre. It will be advisable to purchase it without delay for undoubtedly it will rapidly increase in value.

Langley had surveyed the property personally and informed his fellow Directors that he concurred with the report's conclusions. He further proposed that Swindlehurst be empowered to purchase the estate at a cost of not more than £800 per acre. This was agreed unanimously. At the following meeting Swindlehurst reported that Harrow Park had been purchased.⁵⁰ The estate consisted of 67 acres, rather than the assessor's 63 acres, £3,600 had been given as a down payment, with another £29,000 outstanding.⁵¹ A further £8,000 was later paid for an additional portion of the estate. Given that James Mann, the company surveyor, had estimated its worth at £63,000 (63 acres at £1,000 per acre) and the accepted offer of £40,600 was less than two thirds of this amount, one must either question the accuracy of Mann's report or assume the company had again achieved a considerable bargain.⁵² Plans for construction were drawn up immediately. Houses were to be similar to those on the Shaftesbury Estate, but with further aesthetic considerations. Many were to include mock-gothic features, some even including ornamental turrets. Stone porch canopies would enhance the outward appearance, as would the use of coloured bricks and decorative stonework. Similarly, gardens were to include handsome, cast-iron railings.⁵³ As at Shaftesbury, plans included meeting rooms, schools, churches and washhouses. A vendor named Solomon Frankenberg, who was to play a significant role in the later history of the company, was employed to provide much of the building material used in the construction.⁵⁴ The quality and desirability of the houses was shown in the fact that, even before the foundations had been laid, Langley had received more than 1,000 requests for occupancy.⁵⁵ On 4 August 1874, Langley proposed the new venture be renamed the Queen's Park Estate.⁵⁶

Under Langley's Chairmanship, the AL&GDC had grown to become a substantial building concern; it enjoyed the unparalleled prestige of prime ministerial endorsement, and was now a major metropolitan landowner. But the accumulated capital, which had funded its earlier building enterprises, had failed to match its growing ambitions and was insufficient to exploit its now considerable assets. Langley therefore called an Extraordinary General Meeting. Speaking on 8 October 1874, he first reassured attendees that 'of the current 250,000 company shares, each worth £10 all but 1,000 had been sold'.⁵⁷ Although the company was over extended, he said this was both temporary and surmountable. The solution, he proposed, was that a further 750,000 shares be issued. If passed this measure would ensure that 'The company's capital be increased from the original £250,000 to one million sterling'.⁵⁸ This quadrupling of the company's venture capital was supported by the other

Directors and carried unanimously. The meeting ended with a 'cordial vote of thanks' to both Langley and Secretary Swindlehurst.⁵⁹

While this solved the question of insufficient capital, it raised a second concern. Throughout its existence the AL&GDC had promised, and delivered consistently, highly lucrative dividends of between 5 per cent and 7.5 per cent.⁶⁰ Prudence suggested that the now over-extended company reduce such payments. But if Langley were to take this course of action—no matter how financially judicious—he would risk deterring future investment and do so at a time when such funding was essential. The 1874 *Annual Report to Shareholders*, therefore, contained a proposal from both Langley and Swindlehurst that, rather than pay a dividend from profits, the company would instead pay from *anticipated* profits. Moreover, it would do so at the highly profitable rate of 6 per cent.⁶¹ This satisfied effectively shareholders' expectations and continued to attract investors' funding for building at Queen's Park. But this was to provoke further, and even greater, problems. Lord Shaftesbury, who since 1874 had been President, together with the Lords Elcho and Lichfield—who as 'Arbiters' enjoyed a largely ceremonial role within the company—voiced concerns that such actions might tarnish their reputations for financial propriety.⁶² Shaftesbury and Lichfield went as far as employing an actuary, E. Erskine Scott, to investigate the company's finances. An inconclusive document followed, neither exonerating nor condemning the Directors, though it did criticise the system of paying dividends on estimated, rather than received, profits. Shaftesbury was furious over the wasted expense and declared angrily, 'how I regret the waste, £200 to obtain a report'.⁶³ Despite such a disappointing start this signalled the commencement of a long-running and carefully orchestrated campaign against the Board and against Langley himself.

At the request of his father, Lord Shaftesbury, Evelyn Ashley had become a Director of the company. He had attended only a single meeting but whilst acting in this position he had been present, and spoken at, the official Shaftesbury Estate opening. Here he had told the assembled crowd:

I want to point out there is in this estate a good investment; that this company's tables and financial condition have been submitted to the inspection of a competent actuary, and the report of that actuary can be obtained by anybody who applies for it. And in it the actuary says that the business had been conducted on right principles, and that if the interests of this company are cared for by those

who have the charge of it, it must continue to be a substantial and successful undertaking.⁶⁴

Langley had addressed the crowd shortly afterwards and had taken advantage of the MP's presence to defuse tensions regarding internal disagreements. Langley echoed Ashley's speech but added that, before joining the Board, Ashley had investigated the company fully and that the actuary had found no cause for concern. Furthermore, by using the words 'If the interests of this company are cared for by those who have the have the charge of it, it must continue to be a substantial and successful undertaking' the MP had fully endorsed the Board's handling of financial affairs. When Langley's words were reported in *The Times*, however, Ashley claimed that he had been misquoted and, though insisting that 'I do not express by this communication any distrust of the company or of its operations', he wrote a letter of complaint to the newspaper and another to Langley demanding a public retraction.⁶⁵ Langley refused and in a private communication to the MP wrote:

If you think that under such circumstances it is necessary to your personal honour to state that you had joined the Board without due investigation—I cannot of course presume to interfere but such a course would not only be a practical injustice but will inflict an injury which would be difficult to repair, before you do so would it not be more fair and reasonable to accept the opportunities which we offer—that you shall not only have *all* your questions answered but that you yourself shall see every entry, voucher, cheque, and book, to *test the exactness* of our statements, balance sheets, etc. if you *prove* the suspicions which seem to have been created by the imputations and insinuations of persons who are petty minded enough to be jealous of our success—your honour will be cleared by your public resignation and the Company probably may then go to the temporary discount our detractors may desire, taking with it the reputation of some whose good names are as clear as your own.⁶⁶

He concluded by admitting:

I must confess that I grow weary of dealing with insinuations coming from persons whose names are suppressed and who have not the honesty to make a definite allegation nor the ability to support it—nor the courage to say who they are.



Figure 20: Evelyn Ashley MP, c. 1880s (*Artizans Centenary*, p. 48).

Langley faced further attacks the following year when the Lords Shaftesbury, Lichfield and Elcho—alongside Evelyn Ashley—again combined to demand an Extraordinary Shareholders' Meeting. This was needed, they maintained, to establish a Committee of Investigation to scrutinise the Directors' financial dealings.⁶⁷ Langley disputed the necessity of this, but on 6 March 1876 it was duly held. Both sides were well prepared: the Arbiters with Scott's report and with the testimony of John Pearce, a disgruntled company auditor. Pearce addressed shareholders to warn that 'estimated profits are unlikely to ever become real ones'.⁶⁸ He further advised: 'There were *grave matters connected with the management of the company which urgently called for investigation and that I hoped the Board would not resist the appointment of a committee of inquiry.*'⁶⁹ Langley was able to counter these criticisms easily. He pointed out that Erskine Scott's report, despite Ashley's claims of accessibility, had been withheld from the Board until shortly before the meeting. Having read it he had been surprised to note that, like Pearce's speech, it had as its major criticism the policy of paying dividends on expected rather than actual profits. But as Langley had previously communicated to both Elcho and Lichfield, this policy had been discontinued: 'And consequently the policy of the Board as discussed at the annual meeting is practically approved'.⁷⁰ Furthermore, Langley was able to cite a financial appraisal by barrister J.H. James, which the Directors had themselves commissioned. Dismissing Scott's 'lengthy and somewhat unintelligible report', it fully endorsed Langley and the other Directors:⁷¹

In conclusion, I must impress upon the Directors and Shareholders the advisability of their acknowledging in no way, the demands of Mr. Scott under his Report, and that they should not permit that gentleman to interfere in any way hereafter with the affairs or business of the Company. The proceedings by him seem to me to have been wholly unnecessary, and the report thereon couched in terms the object of which I cannot understand.⁷²

The Arbiters' demand for a Committee of Investigation was then voted upon. Shareholders, presumably grateful for their continued dividends, cast their ballots in support of the Directors. The motion was defeated. As a result, Pearce—along with his fellow auditors E. W. Fithian and the Reverend Dawson Burns—resigned.⁷³ Similarly, Lords Elcho and Lichfield severed all links with the company. Langley and the Board were empowered to continue their policy

of large-scale acquisition and soon after purchased a third London estate, Cann Hall in Wanstead.⁷⁴

Although he had been occupied temporarily in defending his actions from the criticisms of Evelyn Ashley and his associates, the company had never been simply a purely financial venture for Langley; nor was it merely a means to provide affordable housing. Equally important was the availability of cultural and educational opportunities for estate inhabitants. Both Langley and Swindlehurst had worked to make such opportunities accessible.⁷⁵ The Shaftesbury Estate, for example, not only eschewed the sale of alcohol but also had an active Temperance Society replete with a 'Band of Hope'. The South Kensington Science and Art Department had been invited to hold regular classes in technical drawing, geometry and construction. Fetes, concerts, cottage garden competitions and lavish, day-long flower shows had been organised by the company, with judges imported from Kew and Battersea parks. The Estate even possessed a 300-strong volunteer detachment—the 26th Surrey Rifles—with Swindlehurst as its Captain Commandant. Langley had additional and ambitious hopes for the Estate. Since at least 1872 he had combined his social and political campaigning with an involvement in Freemasonry. Beginning at the Era Lodge (No. 1423) at Hampton Court he had a 'meteoric' rise from First Inner Guard in 1873, to Junior Warden in 1874, before being appointed Master in 1876.⁷⁶ As a prospective member for Greenwich he also joined the Royal Oak Lodge, Deptford, then part of the constituency.⁷⁷ The Royal Oak membership was drawn from local maritime industries and membership would undoubtedly have been advantageous politically.⁷⁸ In 1874 Langley wrote to the Masonic Grand Secretary, John Hervey, claiming that on the Shaftesbury Park Estate there was:

A desire on the part of superior officials, superintendents of works and other residents on the estate to be admitted into masonry in a lodge connected with the new town; and the Directors cordially second their desire.⁷⁹

He advised further that the large lecture hall, already planned for the estate, would make an ideal Masonic Hall if consecrated as such. Hervey declined to participate personally but stated that he was happy to advise on the project and the scheme was approved.⁸⁰

Langley had never allowed his membership to temper his radical convictions and many considered him a divisive and controversial figure within the movement. On 7 June 1876, for example, Langley attended the 'Quarterly

Communication of the Grand Lodge of English Freemasons' at the Order's London headquarters.⁸¹ The principal topic of discussion was the safe return of the Prince of Wales from a tour of India. As the Prince was himself a Freemason—elected 'Most Worshipful Grand Master' in 1875 and appointed permanent Master of the Prince of Wales Lodge No. 259—this was deemed a cause for official celebration.⁸² But the form of this observance was to be the catalyst for considerable, and bitter, disagreement. This became apparent during the speech of thirty-year Masonic veteran and employee of the Grand Lodge, Brother Havers:

If ever there was an occasion in which I spoke with confidence this is the occasion, because the subject of my remarks will find its way to the heart of every man present. I beg to propose that this Grand Lodge desires to return its humble and hearty thanks to the Almighty Architect of the universe for the safe return to his native land of their beloved Grand Master, his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, and in memory of that happy event, determine to devote the sum of £2,000 in aid of the restoration of the two churches which are the most intimately connected with the history of freemasonry in England. I therefore beg to move that the sum of £1,000 should be voted for the restoration of St Pauls and a like sum of £1,000 to the restoration of St Alban's.⁸³

In truth, Havers's proposition was more controversial than it appeared. According to Masonic tradition, members were duty-bound to recognise the 'Great Architect of the Universe' but to do so in non-denominational terms. This allowed Freemasons of different faiths to remain a unified body whose individual beliefs were 'personal, private and sacred'.⁸⁴ By allocating Masonic funds to a specific denomination the movement would irreversibly link English Masonry with Christianity and with the Church of England. Such a proposal was anathema to the Unitarian and progressive Langley.

Forewarned about Havers's proposal, Langley had gathered like-minded Freemasons to both express their discontent and mount a counter-proposal. His experience at disrupting opponents' meetings was immediately apparent. At a pre-arranged signal, the group began to loudly heckle the speaker. Turning to face his interrupters, Havers protested:

I am sorry to observe those objections. They show that some have come here with a foregone conclusion, but I will ask those brethren to permit me to state my arguments, which, with all modesty I will endeavour to make clear.

It was of little effect. As he was later to complain:

There were a large number of brethren who congregated at the lower end of the hall who offered the chief interruption and who did not suffer even the resolution to be read without interrupting by loud cries.⁸⁵

One 'Past Grand Officer' complained similarly that 'For the first time I heard hisses in Grand Lodge' and he 'was pained to see many things occur which can hardly be mentioned without a blush of shame rising to the faces of all who assisted by their presence'.⁸⁶ The next speaker, Brother Simpson, was clearly one of Langley's allies and rose in opposition to the motion warning that it would, if passed:

Involve us in questions which we desire to keep entirely distinct from Freemasonry, and that it will be employed in the future to our detriment. If brethren wish to benefit the cathedrals let them come out like men, or like churchmen, and do it; but Grand Lodge represents the whole of Masonry, and, therefore, dipping into its funds for outside purposes is, in a measure, a breach of trust.⁸⁷

Langley then made the more practical point that 'As a great many masons were Jews these brethren were not likely to concur in a vote for ecclesiastical purposes'.⁸⁸ A 'large majority' then carried an amendment that a Special Committee be appointed to investigate 'the best mode in which this feeling can be perpetuated in some practicable form'. This effectively ended the proposed sacerdotal benefaction. Instead, two lifeboats and boathouses were commissioned: The *Albert Edward* at Clacton-on-Sea, being 34 feet long with ten double banked oars; and the *Alexandra*, of similar dimensions, at Hope Cove at the mouth of the Yare on the Devon Coast.⁸⁹ These were launched the following year, with the *Albert Edward* soon afterwards involved in the rescue of sailors of the brig *Garland*, which had beached on nearby sands.⁹⁰

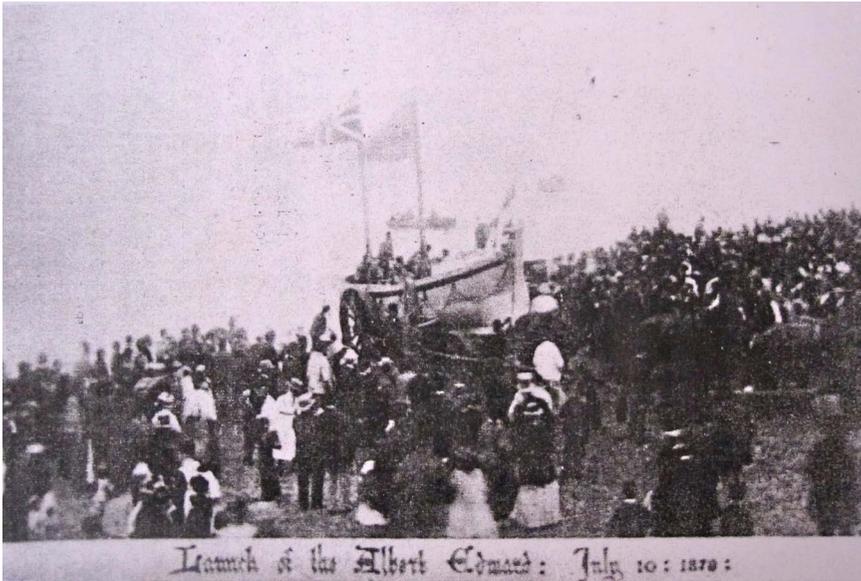


Figure 21: The Launching of the Albert Edward, 10 July 1878 (*The RNLI and the Masonic Lifeboats* (Clacton-on-Sea: I.F. Trinder, 1973) p. 33).

As was so often the case, Langley's victory resulted in considerable resentment. *The Freemason* newspaper declared 'our agreement with Bro. Havers is complete, alike in the abstract and in the concrete' and subsequently printed a series of indignant letters protesting about the conduct of Langley and his co-conspirators.⁹¹ 'A PROVINCIAL GRAND OFFICER', for example, wrote in outrage that the Church of England had been denied preferential treatment. 'Why', he complained 'it is the National Church!'⁹²

Matters were not helped when Langley responded to this criticism by writing to the *Freemason*:

I am, as many members of the order in the north of England are, a Unitarian, and the use of Masonic money to restore and perpetuate architectural emblems derived (as I believe) from the ancient Phallus worship would be offensive and disgusting to me and many others.⁹³

The association of the English Church with pagan phallus worship unsurprisingly provoked a further flurry of indignant criticism. One letter harrumphed, 'If this is the result of modern intellectual studies, God help us all!'.⁹⁴ The paper apologised for printing Langley's letter and declared: 'It will not occur

again, nor any discussion upon it. It is indeed a sad commentary on [the] Masonic profession.’⁹⁵ It was left to the rival *Freemason’s Chronicle* to point out that Langley’s association of the phallus with Christian architecture was not his alone but stemmed from the works of Hargrave Jennings and Godfrey Higgins, who were not only well respected historical scholars but also Freemasons.⁹⁶

This dedication to Freemasonry, combined with the emotional turmoil involved with the end of his marriage, caused Langley to lose focus on the continued threat posed by Evelyn Ashley. Sometime between 1861 and 1871 (the records are silent) Langley left his unhappy marriage to Mary Agnes, and became involved with another woman, Sarah Anne Roberts. Mary, perhaps due to strong religious convictions, did not file for divorce and on census returns continued to describe herself as a married woman.⁹⁷ Sarah—twenty-seven years Langley’s junior—likewise began calling herself Mrs Langley, particularly after the couple had moved into a house on the King’s Road, in Peckham, South London. Here Langley started a second family; the first child, John, being born in 1867. Two other children followed; both boys. Now with two families and combining political ambitions, Masonic activities and Chairmanship of the AL&GDC, Langley became distracted and fell prey to the machinations of his opponents.

When disaster struck, it did so swiftly and without warning. In May 1877 the Board of Directors received a pamphlet by the former auditor John Pearce. Entitled *The Artizans, Labourers and General Dwellings Company Limited: A Statement Addressed to the Shareholders* it contained a series of well-researched accusations against the Board, and in particular, against Swindlehurst. It was accompanied by the following request:⁹⁸

To the Directors of the Artizans, Labourers and General Dwelling Company, Limited.

GENTLEMEN,

WE, the undersigned Shareholders, hereby request you to convene an Extraordinary Meeting of the Members of the Company for the purpose of considering the adoption of the following Resolutions:-

- I. That a Committee of Investigation consisting of eight Shareholders, be appointed to inquire into
 1. The Financial Condition of the Company.
 2. The purchase of the Estates.
 3. The Cost and Qualities of the Materials used in Building.

4. The Methods pursued in Building.
5. The Condition and Prospects of each of the Company's Estates, and
6. Such other matters relating to the General Business of the Company, as they may deem necessary.

II. That such a Committee be now appointed.

III. That the Meeting adjourn until this day two months.

We also request that the Meeting be convened in a building sufficiently spacious to accommodate the Shareholders, and that as soon as the place of Meeting has been selected and the date fixed, we may be informed thereof.

We are Gentlemen,

Yours, &c.,

THE RIGHT HON, SIR FITZROY KELLY KNT.,

(*LORD CHIEF BARON*)

THE RIGHT HON. EARL FORTESCUE

THE RIGHT HON. W.F. COWPER-TEMPLE, M.P.

HON. E. A. ASHLEY M.P.

SIR NATHANIAL M. DE ROTHSCHILD, M.P.

LORD FREDERICK C. CAVENDISH, M.P.

SAMUEL MORLEY, ESQ., M.P.

ERNEST NOEL, ESQ., M.P.

C. M. PALMER, ESQ., M.P.

F. D. MOCATTA, ESQ.

With the demand backed by such influential figures there was little that the Directors could do but capitulate. Langley also issued a statement indicating his willingness to co-operate with the investigation, but he requested that a level of impartiality be maintained. There were many prominent shareholders who had already expressed their antipathy to the Board and if the committee were to be composed entirely of such, a fair decision would be unlikely.⁹⁹ He also offered to present to the Committee his own—and the Board's—conditional resignation pending their verdict.

The Extraordinary Shareholders Meeting was held on 2 June 1877. When the motion to establish a Committee of Investigation was raised a large number

of attendees again supported the Board's actions. Langley's opponents had learned from their previous defeat, however, and a large number of organised proxy votes ensured the proposal would pass.¹⁰⁰ Evelyn Ashley was appointed its Chairman, Samuel Morley and F.D. Mocatta—both vocal critics of Langley's management—were members and the services of John Pearce—author of the condemnatory pamphlet—were immediately sought.¹⁰¹ For Langley this was a grave setback. What made it especially nightmarish was that he had no indication of what the Committee was investigating nor what accusations were being levelled against the Directors. Writing to the Committee he requested that they permit the attendance of company solicitor Charles Needham Longcroft, and also of a secretary to record details in shorthand.¹⁰² Ashley, acting as Chairman of the Committee, declined:

I am desired to say that it [the Committee] is not prepared to accede to your request to allow the solicitor of the Board and a shorthand writer, to be appointed by them, to attend the meeting of the Committee. The Committee consider that their investigation should be conducted independently of the Board, who, it is hoped, will place at their disposal, and that of the professional men employed by them, all necessary books and papers, and when the Committee have reached the proper stage, *they will certainly place before the Board a statement of any complaints or accusations requiring explanations or answers*, should such be made against the Directors or any officer of the Company, *in order that they may have ample opportunity of answering the same.*¹⁰³

The investigation had an immediate and irrevocably adverse effect upon the reputation of the company. On 26 June, Langley received a letter from Swindlehurst. Although it had been common practice for the AL&GDC to take out short-term bank loans with which to fund building works, a request for £20,000 had, for the first time, been declined. The Bank remained polite but adamant in its refusal to lend:

While they have the fullest belief in the strength of your company, and do not doubt that the security is amply sufficient for the larger amount they yet consider that the Bank shall not go beyond the sum already authorized by them.¹⁰⁴

This sudden and unforeseen lack of capital, Swindlehurst warned, would lead to a 'deadlock financially' and if it continued future building work could not

proceed. In the short term this would damage the company's reputation further and make the payment of dividends impossible. In the long term it would inevitably lead to the company's bankruptcy. In short, with the existing Board in place, the company was doomed to insolvency. For Langley—even before the committee had published its conclusions—it was a disaster.

On 2 July, Langley called a Special Board meeting.¹⁰⁵ It was, according to the minute book, 'to discuss the serious position of the company'. Langley's first action was to read to his fellow Directors a letter of resignation from Swindlehurst.¹⁰⁶ The reasons given were:

1st. It would be useless to deny that underneath the agitation or the appointment of a Committee of Investigation there was a manifest feeling of animosity personally against myself. By resigning my appointment, it is to be hoped that this destructive agitation may be stayed, and the Company spared further mischief.

2nd. The Committee having resolved to sit in secret, have denied me and the Board any opportunity of testing the validity of the evidence offered to it.

3rd. The appointment of the Committee, and the agitation which has led to it, have so seriously interfered with the affairs of the Company, the influx of capital has been stopped, the Bank refuses the usual accommodation, and the resources of the undertaking have been strained to the utmost to meet its engagements; and in a week or two we shall not have means to meet the monthly accounts of the Merchants and Deposit Withdrawals, which are heavy, — independent of not being able to pay the half-yearly *interim* dividend, in accordance with the resolution passed at the last meeting of shareholders. Seeing that these difficulties have been brought about by no acts of mine, I beg most respectfully to decline the responsibility which the promoters of the Investigating Committee thrust upon the Management.

Langley then explained that the threat of financial collapse necessitated that the Board, in its entirety, be replaced. Three of the Directors, Alfred Armstrong Walton, Mr Bosley and John Shaw Lowe, then offered their resignations, which were accepted. Langley then proposed their replacement by the mathematician and barrister H.R. Droop (1832–1884), the Reverend Henry

Vincent Le Bas (1828–1914) of the Charterhouse School and Liberal MP Ernest Noel (1831–1931), all of whom were members of Ashley’s Committee of Investigation. These men had been contacted previously and entered the room to take the vacant places around the table. Langley and the remaining Directors then offered their resignations, leaving the Committee in complete control of the company. Evelyn Ashley was immediately appointed the new Chairman.¹⁰⁷ John Pearce was chosen to act as Vice-Secretary.¹⁰⁸

With both control of the Board and the Committee of Investigation, Ashley commenced legal action against Swindlehurst immediately. The accusations took two forms. As Secretary he had been responsible for the purchase of building materials on the estates. These, the Committee of Investigation had ascertained, had been purchased from a single supplier, Solomon Frankenberg. John Pearce had made careful comparisons between prices paid by the company, and found the contractor had indulged in large-scale overcharging:¹⁰⁹

	Company Charged	Market Price
Red lead, per cwt	1. 17. 4.	1. 9. 0.
White lead per cwt	1. 13. 6.	1. 8. 0.
Boiled oil, per gallon	0. 3. 3.	0. 2. 9.
Linseed oil	0. 3. 1.	0. 2. 6. ¹¹⁰
Varnish	0. 16. 6.	0. 12. 0.

Pearce claimed that during his own investigation he had been told that 15 per cent was put on the market price of any article sold to the AL&GDC; the excess was then given as a cash payment ‘to an official of the Company!’¹¹¹ To make matters worse, Frankenberg was a known friend of the Secretary having been the guest of honour at many of the Shaftesbury flower shows that he had organised.¹¹² Worse still, the contractor was an active Freemason and had been a signatory to Langley’s application for a Shaftesbury Lodge and Masonic Hall.¹¹³

This did not accuse Langley directly, but included in the charge was a broader criticism of the latitude allowed Swindlehurst. Builders’ reports in the Directors’ Minutes Books were scarcely recorded, and consisted of little more than ‘Secretary gave a report of building which was very satisfactory and appropriate’.¹¹⁴ There was no analysis of the Secretary’s actions or financial accounts:

But on the contrary the practice seems to have been for two directors to sign from time to time a large number of blank cheques, and to hand them over to the secretary and manager for filling up and issuing at his discretion. It appears that it frequently happened that

no accounts were placed before the directors before they signed the cheques and that they were sometimes signed as long as three weeks or a month before the accounts even came in.¹¹⁵

Although this was clear evidence of malpractice it was not the focus of the Committee's investigation. Further, and more serious, accusations centred on relations between the Secretary and Edward Saffrey, the company Estate Agent. On 3 July 1877, the two men were summonsed to attend Bow Street Police Court on charges of conspiracy to defraud and for theft from the company. As a preliminary hearing this was only to determine if there was a case to answer. On 18 July, Langley was similarly indicted.

The prosecution's accusations were complex and focused upon the procurement by Saffrey—acting for the AL&GDC—of the Queen's Park Estate.¹¹⁶ The estate had been subdivided into five lots. One of these Lot 2 had been purchased at auction by the time the company had expressed interest, and Saffrey had been forced to pay £4,000 to the buyer to surrender his claim. This had doubled the Lot's price from £4,000 to £8,000 but, as the remainder of the Estate had not found a buyer, its cheapness more than covered the outlay. Cheques for Lot 2, and for the other areas of the Estate, had been sent to the company solicitor, Charles Longcroft, to be cashed. What had brought the matter to the attention of the Committee of Investigation was that between the agreement to purchase and the time a cheque was cashed, the price paid for Lot 2 had risen by a further £1,321. This had been paid to Saffrey for his work facilitating the Lot's procurement.¹¹⁷ He had received additional payment for other areas of the Estate.

Thus far, there had been no illegality. The Committee had, however, established a complex link from the money paid to the Estate Agent, back to the members of the Board. When the solicitor, Longcroft, had cashed the cheques at the National Bank, King's Cross, he had received five £1,000 notes numbered 11785–11789.¹¹⁸ These, which were to be paid to Saffrey for his services, or put towards the purchase of the property, should not have returned to the company. On 24 July, William Swindlehurst paid into his own account a £1,000 note numbered 11789. In return he received a £500 note numbered 25514. On 18 October, he also paid in four £1,000 notes numbered 11785–11788.¹¹⁹ On 25 July, John Alfred Woods, a Clerk at the Metropolitan Bank, recalled Langley cashing a £500 note numbered 25514. Included in the smaller denominations, he received a £100 note numbered 73245.¹²⁰

The final link in the chain was Langley's partner, Sarah Anne Roberts. On 30 July, she paid into the Peckham Branch of the London and South Western

Bank a £100 note numbered 73245. A further two £100 notes cashed by Roberts, numbered 71802 and 71803, could be traced back as far as Swindlehurst. Sarah Anne Roberts was called to testify and admitted that Langley had given her the notes.¹²¹ A clear link was therefore established between the payment made to Saffrey and money paid into private accounts by the Directors, and Langley specifically. The prosecution maintained that this could only have occurred if there had been an intention to overpay for the properties, and an agreement struck that this money would return to the private hands of the Directors. This amounted to a conspiracy to defraud and was a criminal offence.

Langley acknowledged receiving the money but denied he had committed any crime:

When this money was first offered me—and I may say I never had any personal communication with Mr. Saffrey at all—it was offered to me on the ground that the company would in no wise suffer, and that if I did not accept it, it would go back into Mr. Saffrey's pocket. Mr. Saffrey was not the person who offered it to me, and I had no communication with Mr. Saffrey during the whole of these transactions.¹²²

This was likely to be correct. Alfred Walton, another of the Directors, gave a similar story. Thirteen days after the purchase of the Cann Hall Estate he had received an envelope through the mail. 'It contained two 200*l.* notes, two 100*l.* notes, and one 50*l.* note—on the flap of the envelope was written 'a present from a friend'.¹²³ Depositing them at the bank, Walton had warned the cashier, 'There is a mystery about these notes and I deposit them here for safety'.¹²⁴ The difference between the behaviour of the two men was that Walton had put the money aside, had been allowed to explain the circumstances of his receiving it and had not been charged. Langley, however, had placed the money in his own and his partner's accounts, and so he was charged. Unsurprisingly, given the evidence, the jury passed true bills against Langley and his co-accused, meaning the case would proceed to trial and the men were officially committed to stand trial at the next session of the Central Criminal Court.¹²⁵ All three men were then released on bail, Langley's personal requirements being increased to two sureties of £1,000 each and himself in £2,000.¹²⁶

Even while protesting his innocence Langley received further bad news. On 24 July 1877 Evelyn Ashley, acting as Chairman of the company, commenced civil proceedings for bankruptcy against both Langley and Swindlehurst.¹²⁷

A motion to this effect had been passed unanimously at a meeting of the new Board of Directors. By doing this Ashley hoped to regain control of the shares owned by the former executives, the number of which, in Langley's case, was considerable. Wishing to avoid further public humiliation Langley had been forced to surrender his remaining stock in the company, an action that rendered him virtually penniless.¹²⁸ Letters written to George Holyoake and other old political associates during this period pleaded for assistance in paying his legal costs.¹²⁹

The following day there was yet more bad news. Ashley had contacted the Home Secretary, Sir Richard A. Cross (1823–1914), about the action against the former Directors. The Home Secretary's office replied:

After consideration of the circumstances he has given instructions that the prosecution of the late manager and some of the late Directors of the Artizans', Labourers' and General Dwellings Company should be conducted at the expense of the public, and by the Treasury Solicitor.¹³⁰

When Ashley's Board of Investigation finally announced its findings at the Westminster Palace Hotel on 3 August 1877, Langley—by this point clearly a broken man—was in attendance. Having listened to the Chairman, Evelyn Ashley boasted that 'in spite of the great loss and extravagance of the past', under his 'economy and improved management' of the company

There is every reason to hope that after a very short interval its financial state may be restored to a sound condition, and that the shareholders may look for a modest return of their invested capital.¹³¹

Langley rose to address the assembled shareholders:

He trusted the meeting would listen to a few words from him as an almost broken hearted man. He had himself never sought any connexion whatever with the company, nor would he have joined the Board had it not been for the request of others. The amount he had received as director's fees was entirely invested in the company, and from time to time he had increased his holding. He asked whether it was likely that a man who was nearly 60 years of age, and who had lived so long with an honoured and respected name, would commit himself in a way which some persons thought he

had. After a reference to the duties and services he had performed, he admitted that the company may have outgrown the capacity of some of those who were on the management, but he believed that was the worst charge which could be brought against them. He thought the Board had adopted a very cruel course, and the committee had deprived him of every farthing which he required for the purposes of his defence.

The meeting then held a discussion and the sum of £300 was voted to John Pearce for his services.

Langley's trial and public humiliation recommenced on 23 October 1877, at the Old Bailey. By this time John Shaw Lowe, another ex-Director, had also been indicted, but had not presented in court, and thus far had evaded capture.¹³² In the light of testimony already heard, there was no doubt that monies had been paid to Langley and the other Directors. The question was whether a crime had been committed. Defence lawyers, led by Gladstone's former Attorney General Sir Henry James (1828–1911), appearing for Swindlehurst and Mr Willis QC for Langley, contended there had not. Their argument was as follows: Saffrey, although he may have been involved in shady dealings, was paid for a genuine service he had provided. The prices paid for the estates purchased were by no means exorbitant and, in the cases of the Shaftesbury and Queen's Park Estates, had proved to be a considerable bargain. Monies paid to Saffrey, therefore, were a legitimate business expense. If he then chose to donate some of this money to the Directors, as an act of appreciation for the business sent his way, he was legally entitled to do so. Rather than an act of conspiracy, it had been an act of generosity. No crime had been committed; charges should therefore be dropped, and the defendants exonerated from all censure. A secondary defence was to show that, although the jury might consider Langley's actions immoral, they were of such a commonplace nature that were they to convict him then prosecutions should follow against a large proportion of the business community of England. 'It was a known truth,' argued Sir Henry James, 'that half the transactions in the City of London were oiled by the giving of presents'.¹³³ A final contention was that, as the money had first been deposited into the account of Longcroft, who was not employed directly by the company, the link had been broken. This was merely a stratagem and although it resulted in the charge of 'Larceny' being dropped, it only allowed the prosecution to concentrate upon that of 'Conspiracy to Defraud'.¹³⁴

The arguments put forward in Langley's defence might have been accepted had the trial been held ten years previously. But Langley had the misfortune of

standing trial amidst sweeping changes in the perception of such behaviour.¹³⁵ The debt-ridden collapse of Overend, Gurney and Company in 1866 had illustrated the dangerous vulnerability of unsupervised share companies.¹³⁶ What had once been a matter of indifference or, at best, something to be settled in the civil courts had, by the 1870s, evolved into a more aggressive governmental policy of intervention. The prosecution of Langley, Swindlehurst and Saffrey represented the cutting-edge of new commercial regulation and the legal landscape had altered in the prosecutor's favour. In addition, claims that—while dishonest—the Directors' actions had not broken the letter of the law, were unlikely to receive a sympathetic hearing in the court of the High Church Scotsman, Judge Robert Malcolm Kerr (1821–1902). During the trial, he stated that his court had 'no reason for public existence unless as a guardian of public morality'.¹³⁷ Known for his harsh sentencing and 'high religious feeling', Kerr was in no doubt of the men's guilt and made it known to the jury. At the close of the trial his summing-up dismissed the arguments put forward by the defence. Although Saffrey might legally have kept the profits earned, he had not. He had shared them with the Directors. Although the estates purchased had risen dramatically in value, and been judicious investments, this in no way affected the men's guilt. Finally, although it could not be proved that a prearranged contract or even a verbal agreement had been made, 'If there was an intention only it was his duty to inform them that in point of law that intention was evidence, and amounted to conspiracy'.¹³⁸ The jury took only forty minutes to reach its verdict. All the defendants were guilty, although they recommended clemency in the case of Edward Saffrey.¹³⁹

Langley was taken into custody to await sentencing. It was an experience he described as 'horrendous'.¹⁴⁰ The decision, and the trial itself, had clearly inflicted a grievous blow to his already weakened health. The following day he returned for sentencing. Offering the Judge medical evidence of his infirmity, he addressed the court. Langley first appealed to the Judge's religious feeling, reminding him that 'There were persons who stand in the position we do now, who looked for mercy at your hands as you might look for it from the Throne of Grace'.¹⁴¹ Then he made a personal plea for mercy:

The prison authorities cannot give me the vital light of intellectual life. They cannot give me what to me is the very air I breathe and the life I live. I am unwilling to detain you, but I wish to say these one or two words with regard to this punishment; and I would that the prosecution would join in the view I now take. It has been held by the highest philosophers and the best lawgivers that the object of

punishment is not revenge. Its object is to deter others from committing the same offence, and I venture to submit to your lordship that a very mild sentence—crushing as even that would be to all of us—would have the deterrent effect desired; and other persons will in the future know the law, which I did not. I acted in perfect innocence, supposing that if a man had made a profit by that transaction he had a right to give of that profit to whomsoever he thought fit. I have learned only within the last few days in consultation with my counsel—and, as Mr. Besley well knows, it came upon me as an astonishing and a new doctrine—that persons occupying the position I did were liable to criminal proceedings for receiving money from a person who had made a profit . . . I am quite willing to leave my health to the care of the medical officers in the prison to which you may send me; but I may say that in the present shattered state of my health there would be a prospect of some few years of extended life to me if I were in circumstances of moderate care and comfort. If I am condemned to prison, with its regulation and discipline, even with all the kindness I can receive from the medical officers, the disease under which I suffer may probably prevent me ever emerging from that gaol again. I appeal to you whether under such circumstances the punishment is not really greater than the offence, and whether under such circumstances I might not hope that the sentence should not be so severe that I might die without these surroundings which every good man would desire, and the happiness of seeing one's children's faces around one's dying bed.¹⁴²

Both the medical evidence and Langley's plea were deemed irrelevant. Kerr informed Langley:

Were I assured that within a week, or within a day, of the passing of sentence on you, Langley, that sentence would be followed by your own dissolution, I could not stay my hand. A duty is imposed upon me by law; judgement is prayed, sentence must be pronounced.¹⁴³

He then sentenced Langley and Swindlehurst to 18 months' imprisonment with hard labour. Saffrey received the lesser sentence of a year. After a lifetime of campaigning, Langley's political career was to end behind the bars of Cold-Bath Fields Prison, Clerkenwell.

Notes

- 1 Eric J. Evans, *The Forging of the Modern British State: Early Industrial Britain, 1783–1870* (London: Longman, 1983) pp. 407–09.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 David Coleman and John Salt, *The British Population: Patterns, Trends and Processes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) p. 57.
- 4 Ibid., p. 41.
- 5 Enid Gaudie, *Cruel Habitations: A History of Working-Class Housing, 1780–1918* (London: Harper & Row/Barnes & Noble, 1974) p. 137.
- 6 Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor: Cyclopaedia of the Condition and Earnings of Those That Will Work, Those That Cannot Work, and Those That Will Not Work* (London: Griffin, Bohn & Company, 1861); Andrew Mearns, *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London: An Enquiry into the Condition of the Abject Poor* (London: James Clarke & Co., 1883). Many other works had previously illuminated the problem of inadequate working-class housing, such as Cheyne Brady, *The Practicality of Improving the Dwellings of the Labouring Class, With Remarks on the Law of Settlement and Removal of the Poor* (London: Edward Stanford, 1854); Charles Girdlestone, *Letters on the Unhealthy Condition of the Lower Class of Dwellings, especially in Large Towns. Founded on the First Report of the Health of Towns Commission* (London: Longman, 1845); Henry Roberts, *The Improvement of the Dwellings of the Labouring Classes* (London: Society for Improving the Condition of the Labouring Classes, 1859); G.B. Tremenheere, *Dwellings of the Labouring Classes in the Metropolis* (London: Knight & Co., 1856); and many others.
- 7 Mayhew, *Outcast London*, p. 7.
- 8 Alan George Fryer, *The Burradon Colliery Disaster: A Detailed Account* (Northumberland, 1996) p. 9 <https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B8uwCkN5_X3UR1c2dktPN3A4YUE/edit> [accessed 12 August 2013].
- 9 Richard Metcalfe, F.S.S., *Sanitas Sanitatum et Omnia Sanitas*, vol. 1 (London: Co-op publishing, 1877) p. 298 <—Greenwich’, *Daily News*, 11 July 1865.
- 10 Susannah Morris, ‘Market Solutions for Economic Problems: Working-Class Housing in Nineteenth-Century London’, *Economic History Review*, vol. 54, no. 1, 2001, p. 526.
- 11 Anthony S. Wohl, *The Eternal Slum: Housing and Social Policy in Victorian London* (London: Transaction Publishers, 1977) pp. 146–47.
- 12 Gaudie, *Cruel Habitations*, p. 233.
- 13 Philip Temple, ‘Shaftesbury Estate’, in *Survey of London: Battersea Part 2, Housing and Housing* (Yale: Yale Books/Bartlett School of Architecture, 2013) p. 252.
- 14 LA, Acc/IV/122, cited by Temple, *Survey of London*, p. 253.
- 15 ‘Martin & Sons, Agents for The Artisans’ [sic], Labourers’ and General Dwellings Company’, *Manchester Examiner*, 2 November 1870.
- 16 ‘Letter from Martin & Sons to the Manchester Times’, *Manchester Times*, 3 November 1870.

- 17 *Artizans, Labourers and General Dwellings Company Minutes Book, 1873–1877*, 13 March 1877.
- 18 *Northern Star*, 12 February 1848; <www.keithatkinson.me.uk/genealogy/5-william-swindlehurst-1824-c-1891-the-lamartine-yates/> [accessed 18 February 2014].
- 19 Martin Bond, *Artizans Centenary, 1867–1967* (London: The Artizans' and General Properties Company, 1967) p. 9.
- 20 *Artizans, Labourers and General Dwellings Company Minutes Book, 1869–1870*, 29 June [marked incorrectly as July] 1870.
- 21 *Ibid.*
- 22 *Ibid.*
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Conclusion

The catastrophic end to Langley's campaigning career—combined with his middle-class background—has resulted in his being overlooked or mentioned only as a minor figure in nineteenth-century history. Whilst his contemporaries either composed their own (often self-serving) versions of nineteenth-century radicalism—George Jacob Holyoake's *Sixty Years of an Agitator's Life*, for example—or had these written for them—as with Hypatia Bradlaugh's biography of her father *Charles Bradlaugh: A Record of his Life*—Langley's fall from grace prevented any such eulogising.¹ The absence of a substantial archive of personal papers further condemned him to obscurity, although a diligent trawling through newspapers and periodicals has made it possible to reconstruct his career as a radical campaigner.

Modern historians have tended to perceive the period in which Langley was active as a time of political consensus between Liberals and Conservatives, or they have focused on the rise of trade unionism and the antecedents of the Labour Party at the expense of mainstream Liberalism. The collaboration between middle-class reformers, such as Langley, and their working-class counterparts—something that existed and persisted until well after the century's end and the rise of socialism—has therefore been viewed as an anomaly. Langley was a wealthy, well-educated and respectable Victorian male who was a vociferous critic of society; a middle-class activist who, through involvement in working-class trade unionism, displayed not the class-solidarity beloved of Marxist critique but the opposite. He was a political campaigner who sought to extend the franchise not only to working-class men but also to women; he was a man who publicly rejected socialism but who, as a Liberal, remained a diligent and effective political campaigner for reform. As such, Langley has fallen between historical interpretations of the period: a radical in the 'Age of Equipose' and an unwelcome, middle-class presence in the story of working-class political organisation. Fitting neatly into no single historiographical narrative, the contributions of Langley, and those who worked alongside him, have been neglected.

It is surely time for this to be reassessed. When former British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, promised ‘a return to Victorian values’ those values were viewed through a prism of her own political preconceptions. The study of middle-class radicals such as John Baxter Langley shows that many Victorians held political, social and ethical beliefs in stark contrast to those glibly attributed to them. Conversely, much of what came under sustained attack during the Conservative administration that she led could trace its origins and philosophies back to Victorian values and to the actions of men such as Langley. Social housing, trade unionism, comprehensive education, religious tolerance, women’s emancipation and the nature of British democracy itself were all part of Langley’s long career of political campaigning. Similarly, it is not difficult to trace recent criticism of western military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan back to the actions of nineteenth-century peace-campaigners and their opposition to imperial adventures in India and mainland China. As such, the life and campaigns of John Baxter Langley are both relevant and a reminder of our history, heritage and political and social development.

* * * * *

Langley’s prison term was more than his already fragile constitution could endure. Much of his sentence was spent in the prison infirmary and he was released four months early on compassionate grounds.² His days of political campaigning were over; his social and professional life was dismantled; and his energetic commitment to reform overshadowed by his later disgrace. Newspaper coverage of the scandal had been widespread.³ Even before the trial had commenced, Langley had written to the Greenwich Advanced Liberals to forego future claims to represent the borough:

Gentlemen—though I feel in my own conscience that I am no less worthy of your support than heretofore, I am assured by my friends that the imputations cast upon me by the cruel action now pending are fatal to my future candidature for your suffrages. I therefore withdraw at once, in the hope that such prompt action may serve the interests of the political Party for whom I have spent my means and the best years of my life.—J. BAXTER LANGLEY.⁴

In November 1877, barely a month after the trial, he had been expelled formally from the Order of Freemasons.⁵ The warrant for the Shaftesbury Park Lodge was cancelled.

On 16 April 1878, the Royal College of Surgeons of England declared:

In the opinion of the Council the offence of which Mr. John Baxter Langley has been convicted is of such nature as to render him unfit to remain a member of the College and that he accordingly be removed from being a member of the College.⁶

On 4 July 1878. Langley was also ‘removed’ from the fellowship of the Linnean Society, of which he had been a member since November 1865.⁷

Without Langley and the old Directorate, the AL&GDC abandoned the social radicalism that had marked—and inspired—its early years and became a respectable and profitable company. William Swindlehurst had reported in 1877 that company rents on the Shaftesbury Estate were 35 per cent lower than in the surrounding districts.⁸ Evelyn Ashley was quick to rectify this mistake. Rents increased several times on AL&GDC properties provoking a body of Shaftesbury residents to present the new Chairman with a memorial of complaint. Ashley persuaded the petitioners to strike out one clause, accepted it, and it was subsequently ignored.⁹ The open space of Brassey Square that Langley had envisaged being the centre point of the community was built over. The Lecture Hall was demolished and replaced by a row of seven houses.¹⁰ Plans for the construction of a Shaftesbury Estate railway station were likewise revoked.¹¹ Most significantly, the system of selling to tenants was discarded, and, wherever possible, houses that had been sold were repurchased by the company.¹² The initial goals of providing affordable housing for the poor had been entirely abandoned; in their place Ashley was able to boast: ‘Your Directors are, in conclusion, glad to be able to state their firm belief that the company may, in their opinion, look forward to a prosperous future.’¹³

Langley’s own future held no such prospects. His reputation was that of a charlatan and even his personal affairs had been opened to the salacious inspection of the newspapers. The *Newcastle Courant*, for example, reported upon his relationship with Sarah Anne Roberts:

It has transpired that the person who lived with him, and passed as Mrs. Langley, was not Mrs. Langley at all, and these are not the relations which entitle people to honour and respect whether they be men or women, rich or poor.¹⁴

With his release from prison and his health declining, Langley disappeared from public life. He and Sarah moved to West Ham in Essex. In September 1888, shortly after the death of Langley’s first wife, the couple were finally able to marry.¹⁵ We can presume it was something that they had long waited to

do. By this time they had three children together: John Cecil, aged 13; Walter Raleigh, aged 11; and Henry Longfellow, who was 9 years of age.¹⁶ By 1888, however, their financial position was so desperate that Josephine Butler—remembering Langley’s ‘good service for us’—wondered if ‘perhaps a small subscription might be raised’.¹⁷ In the census for 1891 Langley was described as being partially paralysed.¹⁸ But he was also, as he had requested of Judge Kerr, ‘In surroundings which every good man would desire, and [with] the happiness of seeing one’s children’s faces around one’s dying bed’.¹⁹ On Sunday 28 February 1892, *Reynolds’s Newspaper* reported Langley’s demise:

The announcement that Dr Baxter Langley is dead calls up a far-away echo of the great battle of a quarter of a century ago in which Dr Langley took so prominent a part. Since then a painful incident relegated the deceased to a period of punishment, and then of obscurity. Dr Baxter Langley’s offence was doubtless grave, but he surely purged himself of it before he died, and we prefer to think of him in his earlier days when he did good work for the cause of democratic progress, and showed himself a keen and courageous reformer.²⁰

It was a fitting tribute to a man who has been too-long forgotten.

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Postscript

By examining a number of John Baxter Langley's major campaigns, this work has demonstrated that he was an active, radical reformer. Langley's story is, however, far from complete and there are aspects of his career which, of necessity, have been relegated to the realm of future study and the preparation of a fuller biography. More research will locate Langley in the labyrinthine networks of middle-class radical politics and, perhaps, lead to a more nuanced understanding of what it meant to be both radical and middle class in mid-Victorian Britain. The former will require research in a range of archives and the latter a closer investigation of Langley's varied business ventures. A narrowly focused history often raises as many questions as it answers, and this work is no exception. It has achieved its principal goal, however, in drawing attention to the campaigning career of an otherwise forgotten middle-class radical. With ongoing research and reflection, other aspects of Langley's life can be incorporated in a biography that retains as its foundation and core his achievements as a campaigner.

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BLC—British Library Colindale, London

BLG—British Library Gale Newspaper Collection

BMJ—British Medical Journal Online Archive

COC—Co-operative College, Manchester

DUL—Dominion University Library, Norfolk, Virginia

EUL—Centre for Research Collections, Edinburgh University Library

FCOC—Foreign and Commonwealth Office Collection, King's College, London

GHC—Greenwich Heritage Centre

IA—Institute and Faculty of Actuaries, London

IDL—University of Iowa Digital Library

KCL—King's College, London

LA—Lambeth Archive, London

LMF—The Library and Museum of Freemasonry, London

LS—Linnean Society, London

LSE—London School of Economics

MRUW—Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick

NA—National Archives, Kew

NCAP—National Archives at College Park, Maryland

NLA—National Library of Australia

NYPL—New York Public Library

NYT—New York Times Archive

OL—Open Library

PC—Private Correspondence

PP—Papers Past New Zealand Newspaper Archive

RU—Department of Rare Books, Special Collections and Preservation,
Rochester University, New York

SD—Science Direct Online Archive

THD—Thomas Haines Dudley Collection, Huntingdon Library, California

TOL—The Times Online

TWA—Tyne and Wear Archives, Newcastle

UBL—University of Bristol Library

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‘David M. George’s important and original study of John Baxter Langley’s life restores to us the career of a great British radical.’

*Rohan McWilliam, Professor of Modern British History,
Anglia Ruskin University*

Once notorious but now largely forgotten, the political idealist and radical John Baxter Langley (1819–1892) was typical of the well-educated and ethical Victorians who struggled to create a fairer, more equal society. Through a long and wide-ranging career of political agitation he was a journalist, editor and owner of several newspapers, was prominent in the call for franchise reform, and opposed religious legislation that prevented Sunday entertainment and education for working men and women.

Langley was also integral to the founding of a trade union, campaigned for an end to public executions and built affordable housing in Battersea. Internationally, he condemned the Second Opium War, exposed British brutality in India and worked covertly for Lincoln’s administration. He was a fellow-traveller for many other key radicals of the day, while his founding of the ‘Church of the Future’ garnered the support of Charles Darwin, James Martineau and John Stuart Mill.

Through a chronological narrative of Langley’s activities, this book provides an overview of many of the most significant political causes of the Victorian era: electoral reform, feminism, slavery, racism, trade unionism, workers’ rights, the free press, leisure, prostitution, foreign relations and espionage. A neglected but important figure in the history of nineteenth-century radicalism, this work gives John Baxter Langley the attention he deserves and reveals the breadth of his legacy.

David M. George is an Honorary Associate at the University of New England (Australia), focusing on nineteenth-century social and political history.

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