

The dynasty-builders of Victorian Leicester

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The ousting of the old Tory Corporation of Leicester by a rising group of Radical Dissenters in 1836 is well known. The tremendous struggle between the established and the outsiders has been described in considerable detail by a wide range of historians, both amateur and professional, from those who were personally involved in the process to those who are able to take a more detached view in this century. James Thompson, George Searson, Mrs. Fielding-Johnson, R. W. Greaves, A. Temple Patterson and Professor Jack Simmons all give versions of the same story, the triumph over corruption by a new honest and God-fearing business 'aristocracy'.¹ However, none of these commentators inquire into the means whereby the new wielders of authority in Leicester society maintained their control. The Radical Dissenters or the Liberal Non-Conformists, as they came to be known later, dominated town politics, industry, religious institutions and voluntary work for the entirety of Victoria's reign. How was this dominance maintained?

Before a satisfying answer in socio-historical terms can be attempted, certain confusions, themselves a legacy of Victorian bourgeois modes of thought, must be cleared away. The 'new' men of 1836 constituted a cohesive elite group which increased in size as the century advanced. Furthermore, the structure of the group became more differentiated with the passage of time. The group which won political control of the town in 1836 consisted of a mere handful of families, eight in all, while that which controlled the town in the 1870's, 1880's and 1890's was made up of some sixty major families and some forty minor families. This classification is somewhat arbitrary but it serves to isolate the constituent elements of the elite group empirically. (See accompanying table). The group not only increased in size but became more differentiated with time for gradually a Conservative Anglican element made its appearance and the range of industries and professions on which these dynasties were anchored widened. Nevertheless, despite increasing size and differentiation, the group retained its solidarity. If anything, its culture became firmer and surer. The newness of elite culture gave way to a quality of 'oldness' which advanced its authority:² those newly recruited in the group quickly internalized the values cherished by its members and the expectations which shaped their behaviour.

These group qualities are obscured, however, in the sources which the historian and sociologist must use in studying Victorian Leicester. For the Liberal Non-Conformists were devotees of a cult which the great French sociologist, Emile Durkheim so greatly feared—the cult of the individual.

To a man, they were Utilitarian in their philosophy. The obituary of Joseph Whetstone, one of the undisputed leaders of the elite group in the early stages of its formation, reflects the Utilitarianism of both subject and author. According to this source, Joseph Whetstone was 'a firm believer in Adam Smith' and was heard to say frequently that 'whoever contributes capital promotes prosperity'. He was an austere man who never missed walking daily from his house on London Road to his mill at Frog Island, no matter what the weather and despite increasing age and availability of carriages. His industry, punctuality and integrity accord well with the image of the rational capitalist and the self-made man.³

Table 1: Dynasties of Victorian Leicester

A. <i>Early stage of elite formation</i>	
<i>Major</i>	<i>Minor</i>
Biggs	Angrave
Brewin	Baines
Ellis	Billson
Fielding	Coltman
Harris	Corah
Paget	Cort
Stokes	Mitchell
Whetstone	Rowlett
	Walker
	Weston
Total=8	Total=10
B. <i>Late stage of elite formation</i>	
<i>Major</i>	<i>Minor</i>
Baines (John)	Almond
Barfoot	Anderson
Bennett (John)	Angrave
Bennion	Baines
Brown	Bennett (H. & D.)
Cook	Billson
Corah	Bolton
Ellis	Bruce
Evans	Chambers
Fielding Johnson	Coltman
Freer	Cort
Gee	Crick
Gimson (Josiah)	Cripps
Gimson (William)	Donisthorpe
Goddard	Durrad
Harris (up to 1888)	Everard
Harvey	Frears
Hewitt	Frisby

Table 1—*continued*

Hodges	Gittins
Kemp	Gleadow
Kempson	Groves
Lankester	Harding (Charles)
Lennard	Harding (Samuel)
Levy (and Hart)	Harris (Joseph)
Lorrimer	Hawkes
North	Heath
Oliver	Jarvis (W. G.)
Paget	Keene
Pickard	Kendall
Pochin	Lovell
Russell (Benjamin)	McCall
Russell (Samuel)	Marshall
Roberts	Mantle
Rowlett	Nunneley
Rowley	Partridge
Royce	Paul
Sawday	Percival
Stevenson	Pick
Stibbe	Preston
Tabberer	Raven
Taylor	Rowlett
Toller	Sarson
Turner (Archibald)	Squire
Turner (W. E.)	Stimpson
Tyler (John)	Stafford
Tyler (William)	Swain
Viccars	
Vincent	
Wakerley	
Walker	
Ward	
Wates	
Wildt	
Winterton	
Wood	
Wright	
Wykes	
Total=58	Total=47

The concept of 'self made man' was the key to the consciousness of the elite group. This is confirmed again and again in the reading of obituaries of these patriarchal figures for the whole of the period between 1836 and the outbreak of the Great War. The early Radical Dissenters were truly self made in that, without the privileges of birth, they developed new sources of wealth

in industry and commerce and successfully sought for control of the town's political machinery. Many of the members of the later Liberal Non-Conformist group were equally self made men for they founded their own firms and prospered as the economy of Leicester expanded in the second half of the nineteenth century. The foundation of a successful business enterprise provided access to elite circles.

Their ideology is exemplified well by a biography of Richard Harris, the founder of a very important hosiery firm.⁴ This work developed out of a sermon which the Rev. Thomas Lomas preached at the funeral of Richard Harris and it retains marks of its origins throughout for the reader is constantly urged to follow the example of this self made man. The book is prefaced by an appropriate quotation from Chaucer:

'As when a man hath been in poor estate
And climbeth up and waxeth fortunate
And there abided in prosperity
Such thing is gladsome as it thinketh me'.

Lomas contrasts the lowliness of Richard Harris' origins with the great heights which he achieved by the end of his life. The printer's apprentice became the owner of a large and prosperous hosiery business, an eminent figure in provincial society and a Member of Parliament. According to Lomas, all this was achieved by Richard Harris himself. We are told that 'his success flowed from native resources' and 'he created his own circumstances: his circumstances did not create him'.

This firm commitment to the notion of the self made man, so central in the belief system of the elite group, obscured both for its members and for historians the structural properties of this phenomenon. The question of how the elite group retained its hold on Leicester society, posed earlier, cannot be answered in terms of the individual qualities of men such as Joseph Whetstone and Richard Harris. It can be answered only in terms of the structure of the elite group and the complex sets of interdependencies between this group and others within its environment.

Empirically, it can be demonstrated that the group consisted of a constantly increasing number of what are commonly called business families. These structures which combined kinship and the pursuit of profit through the production and sale of goods and services can be most conveniently conceptualized as dynasties. 'Dynasty' is an appropriate term because these structures persisted over generations. Moreover, the rules of inheritance about property and positions of power and authority which were accepted by members of the group bear a striking resemblance to those which have always characterized the British monarchy, aristocracy and gentry.

The rise of a new elite group in Leicester society depended very largely on the transference of centuries old patterns of behaviour to new social situations for, although it would never have come into existence without the process of industrialization, its rise cannot be explained in economic terms alone. Its continuing success and confidence depended on the emergence of a new culture in which traditional solutions were transmitted, adapted and made useful in a changing world.

The notion of dynasty-building proved highly functional in maintaining continuous and effective control within business firms by the kin group. It also provided the motivation necessary for the early entrepreneurs in their struggles to establish their enterprises and for their successors in later generations to continue their battles against harsh economic realities. But the 'family idea' or the dynasty principle was functional in a far wider sphere than the kin group and the business firm. It was a principle which could be applied within the structure of provincial society itself to the end that the dynasts of the elite group should maintain their dominance over the mass of Leicester's inhabitants outside working hours as well as within. Dynasty-building was the principle strategy used by members of the elite group to consolidate their hold on provincial society. This can be seen very clearly after their seizure of power in 1836 but it was a strategy used to good effect long before that momentous year.

All these themes cannot be adequately developed within the space of a short article and therefore the following analysis will focus on the basic unit of the elite group, the dynasty itself.⁵

There can be no doubt that the founder of the dynasty was he who started a business acknowledged as successful by contemporaries and which continued to be controlled by the founder's sons, grandsons and succeeding generations. Usually the first born in each generation bore the same Christian name. Leicester businessmen, unlike their American counterparts did not affix numbers to each generation and refer, for instance, to Richard Harris I, Richard Harris II and Richard Harris III (although this practice has been adopted here to clarify presentation). However, they did use the terms 'elder' and 'younger' and some third generation sons were given 'Tertius' as a middle name. Thus, in the Paget family, the association with banking was begun by a Thomas Paget who became a partner of Pares and Heygate in 1800. His son, Thomas, inherited his place in the business in 1814 and in a sense founded the fortunes of the dynasty when he left the Partnership and set up on his own some years later. However his son, another Thomas Paget, was given the middle name of Tertius and so it appears that his grandfather, not his father, was regarded by the Pagets as their founder.⁶

Thus, one of the continuing features of the culture of these business families was the drive to found and maintain dynasties which would endure from generation to generation. In family after family, each generation of sons was brought into the family firm. The dynasts thought it the most natural thing in the world to bring their eldest sons into their business firms with a view to training them as their successors. They shared the expectation, in addition, that as many as possible of their younger sons should be taken in and trained for positions of responsibility commensurate with the dignity of the family.

Oral traditions, which have been collected during interviews with the descendants of the Victorian dynasty-builders, point to the accommodation of sons who were far from able. Or, at least, they give some indication of the way in which certain members are defined, even now, as less able and as poorer performers in business than their brothers. There is no less subjective means of assessing them and it may be that these traditions reflect power differentials

within families as much as anything. Labelling of this kind was based inevitably on the making of comparisons. Almost all the dynasties included members who were not very capable yet, nevertheless, they were found places in the family firm on the basis of kinship and they were allowed to retain them in spite of dubious ability. The striking point is that they constitute a small minority. Most young men carried forward the business founded by their father, grandfather and great grandfather quite adequately. Some did it brilliantly.

The principle widely accepted among businessmen was that the head of the dynasty should provide for his own progeny rather than meet obligations which might have been placed on him by the more extended kin group. The drive was to establish a dynasty with one's own sons and grandsons manning the positions within it. Consequently there seem to be few cases of brothers founding a firm together and handing it on to their children although there were many firms managed by brothers in the second generation. The Lennard brothers, for instance worked together at first but it appears that they quarrelled frequently. So Samuel Lennard remained in Leicester and developed a highly successful boot and shoe firm while his brothers went elsewhere to seek their fortunes. One founded the shoe retailing firm of Lennard's of Bristol and another established the Public Benefit Boot Company in Leeds.⁷

Acceptance within the elite group depended on the founding of a successful firm over which the family secured control by providing capital and managerial manpower for it. Consequently, the ability to make money commanded the greatest of respect among the dynasty-builders and explains their ready acceptance of 'foreigners', men born outside Leicester society. Robert Walker, a Scotsman, acquired control of Ann Wood and Sons, one of the leading hosiery firms in the early part of the century and won acceptance in spite of his Scottish birth. William Taylor, the co-founder of the highly successful engineering firm Taylor, Taylor and Hobson in the 1880s was also born outside this small provincial society but his genius for money-making inventions was accorded the greatest respect. In the case of the non-British, however, acceptance was much slower. Edwin Wildt's very considerable ability in the field of textile machinery design and production did nothing to offset his German birth. During the First World War, he was forced to leave Leicester for America. There were few 'foreigners' in Leicester at any level in the social hierarchy. The number of Irish labourers was very small indeed and there were no foreign merchants like those to be found in that great regional capital, Manchester.

It was not easy for strangers to win a place in the elite group and although success in business was generally recognized as the means of entrance some ambitious young men saw that non-business connections enhanced their chance of founding successful enterprises. Thus, like the notable Thomas Cook, Watkin Lewis Faire used his Temperance connections to gain access to the elite group early in his career. He started life as a bobbin net hand in Derby but later he came to Leicester as agent and missionary for Leicester Temperance Society. When he went into business on his own account in the

boot and shoe trade in the 1860s he utilized the contacts which he made as Temperance missionary. This is the interpretation preserved by oral tradition among present day Faires and, in the absence of any other evidence it seems as reasonable an interpretation as any other.

The sons of the leading businessmen believed that they were under an obligation to make good matches, i.e., marriages which would advance the interests of the family and firm or, at very least, not detract from the achievement of familial goals. Accordingly, matches were made within a highly circumscribed social space. The marriages of founders tended to reflect their humble origins. Thus the wife of the founder of a dynasty was usually a member of some obscure family. Her kin folk were as little known as those of her husband before his successful business activities had assured both they and their children a place in the elite group. When the rise of the dynasty was slow, the sons of the founder were likely to marry into families of the second rank, on the margins of the elite group, but if upward mobility was rapid then marriages were made with girls of the very first families. Thus, the second generation Gees, sons of the powerful Harry Simpson Gee of the highly successful boot and shoe firm, Stead and Simpson, married into the Astley Clarkes, the Tollers and the Gimsons: later there were Gee connections with the Tylers, the Freers and the Corahs.

Marriage alliances made by members of the small group of dynasties in the 1830s and 1840s tended to be associated with religious affiliations. By the 1870s and 1880s, this was replaced by the building up of connections in the dominant group in Leicester itself, irrespective of the religious traditions of the family: these connections tended to cluster around common business interests. Thus, among the early dynasties, the Biggses and the Brewins were integrated into a Unitarian network which extended well beyond Leicester. William Biggs married Mary Worthington and Robert Brewin's daughter Elizabeth also married into the Worthington family. The Worthingtons were probably members of the Liverpool business elite. Another of the Brewins, Anne Jane Brewin married a Liverpool man, William Henry Walker who was the nephew of another Leicester Unitarian businessman of some importance, Thomas Stokes.⁸ So, without having detailed knowledge of the network, one may speculate as to the existence of a Unitarian kin structure which existed in Leicester and Liverpool and possibly elsewhere. The Pagets were certainly linked into this complex of connections for John Paget, the younger brother of Thomas Tertius Paget, married Elizabeth Rathbone of Liverpool. The Rathbones were considerably more eminent than the Worthingtons and the Walkers so the network was probably differentiated into strata of prestige.⁹

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, there appears to be a reduction in the association between religious affiliation and marriage alliances. There was more inter-marriage among the dynasties based on Leicester itself and, in some cases, networks developed around one industry. A good example of this is the Faire-Wood-Lennard connection. The founder of the Faire small-wares business had a sister, Emma, who married William Wood in 1838 before the Faires migrated from Derby to Leicester. Emma's son, Edward Wood, followed his uncle and set up in a related industry, the manufacture of boots

and shoes and eventually built up the giant firm by Leicester standards, of Freeman Hardy and Willis. One of Edward Wood's three daughters married another successful entrepreneur in the boot and shoe industry, Samuel Lennard. Thus three of the leading firms in Leicester's boot and shoe industry in the last decades of the nineteenth century were controlled by kinsfolk.

Some of the rising capitalists of Victorian Leicester found the path to the establishment of a dynasty beset with many problems. Infertility, for instance, was a condition they could do little about and no matter how prosperous a man might become, the dynasty-principle could hardly be upheld if he had no sons. There was however a traditional solution available and this was incorporated into elite culture together with the dynasty-building principle itself. It was expected that where the head of a dynasty had no heirs he would 'adopt' one of his nephews. Quite a large proportion of the dynasties of the elite group in its early years of formation had to resort to this solution but for the later dynasty-builders a surplus of sons was a more frequent problem than none at all.

The Fielding family firm, a spinning concern, was founded in 1818. The second generation head of the family had no children, however, and the continuity of the dynasty was threatened. Joseph Fielding 'adopted' his sister Eliza's son, Thomas Fielding Johnson whose prospects were thought to be improved thereby since his father was a poor Nottinghamshire school master. In later years, this 'adoption' was obscured by the Fielding Johnsons. When Thomas Fielding Johnson died in 1921, his obituary writer made no mention of Joseph Fielding. He merely stated that Thomas Fielding Johnson was educated at a private school in Nottingham and then joined the firm of Fielding and Johnson in Leicester.¹⁰

The continuity of the dynasty could also be threatened by the early death of the head. If the head of the dynasty died before his sons could be introduced into the firm and trained to manage it efficiently then some sort of regent was demanded for a period of inter-regnum. There were, however, few cases of this among the dynasties of the elite groups. Many heads lived to a ripe old age and kept control of both family and firm for as long as it lay within his capacity to do so. Their sons had to wait many years for their independence.

Wait they did for there is not one example available of an elder son who irked by his father's longevity and discipline renounced his inheritance. Among younger sons, there were a few black sheep, especially towards the end of the Victorian period, but the degree of conformity to dynastic expectations was remarkably high.

The dynasties were not, however, always characterized by harmony and concord. Particularly with the passage of time, tensions arose between family members which related to the dynasty-building principle itself. As we have seen, brothers rarely founded firms together but, in the second generation, they were usually compelled to work in the same enterprise. Sibling rivalry may well have given rise to disputes of many kinds but the dispute most likely to occur arose in relation to the placing of their sons in the firm. In the dynasty founded by Josiah Gimson an unusual solution was found to this problem. In

the second generation, the Gimson engineering firm was managed by Josiah's sons, Josiah Mentor, Arthur and Sydney together with their cousin Jess. Each of the four men had sons, many of them. Indeed there were fourteen third generation males eligible for accommodation in the one firm. It seems that the Gimsions saw this situation as a possible source of tension for they concluded a formal agreement between themselves: each partner was to bring into the firm one son only. In each case, the eldest son was chosen to succeed his father in the firm according to the norms of the dynasty-builders.

Rivalry between brothers as to the placement and advancement of their sons was mitigated in other dynasties where there was more than one family firm. For instance, there was a multiplication of firms in which capital was invested in the Goddard dynasty during its second generation phase and this reduced rivalry between grandsons of the founder. The founder of this dynasty was Joseph Goddard who invented a commercially successful plate powder but it was his son Joseph Wallis Goddard who expanded the fortunes of the family. He inherited his father's business but it is said that he was never really interested in it. As a young man, he trained for three years under Sir Gilbert Scott, the architect, but he was persuaded to return to Leicester after the brief period of release from elite group pressures and work with his father. The plate powder business prospered and when Joseph Wallis succeeded his father as head of the dynasty he was able to look around for business concerns of greater interest for him. His early interest in architecture was replaced by a passion for engineering. He drew capital gradually out of the plate powder business and invested it in other firms, Imperial Typewriters Ltd., Wadkin Ltd., (wood-working machinery), Bentley Engineering Company and the Super Lawn Mower Company.

One consequence of Joseph Wallis Goddard's success was that there was no problem about finding places for his three sons in such a way that rivalry and tensions were unlikely to occur. It is a family tradition that the eldest son Joseph Goddard was put into Wadkin Ltd., because he had an aptitude for business while the two younger sons went into the plate powder firm which 'ran itself'. However there was no choice for fourth generation Goddards. For them, the succession proceeded along customary lines: thus the third Joseph Goddard was succeeded by his son at Wadkin Ltd., while his younger brothers were followed by their sons in the Goddard plate powder business.

Remedies for such problems were at hand even within those dynasties where the Goddard solution was unavailable. As industrialization advanced and Leicester firms became larger, there was room for specialization in management. Consequently the norm arose whereby the sons of the founder came to be responsible for particular functions within the firm and for their sons to succeed them in these specializations. It was as if dynasties within dynasties were founded. For instance, Stephen Hilton was joined by his four sons, Joseph George, Stephen and Frederick in the 1880s and 1890s. By the time they had succeeded their father and were introducing their sons into the firm they had built up specialisms for themselves. Joseph was buyer of men's shoes, George the buyer of women's shoes and Frederick the buyer of hosiery and sundries. (George's speciality is not recorded in the history of

the firm.¹¹) It would be a mistake, however, to over emphasize specialization as a characteristic of Leicester firms even in the late nineteenth century or early twentieth. Compared with modern business enterprises, specialization was relatively underdeveloped.

Sometimes, conflicts between brothers and sisters led to excessive strains and, in the case of the dynasty founded by the eminent Richard Harris, resulted partially in the collapse of the firm. These tensions had their origins in the dynasty-building principle too for if sons only were taken into the family business daughters had to be provided for somehow or other. No patriarch of any standing within elite circles allowed his women folk to earn their own living. In most cases, daughters were expected to make good matches within the elite group: in other cases, they were prevented from marrying by their parents and kept within their households to care for their needs. Indeed, from the view point of the dynasty-builder the gains of marrying off a daughter could be outweighed by losses. Daughter's sons were not used as manpower within the dynasty into which they married: if their husbands had no firm of their own, then they were viewed with suspicion although there are a few instances of sons-in-law working within these family businesses. Thus, the dynasts often preferred their daughters as old maids.

But if daughters remained unmarried, their fathers had to make financial provision for them and herein lay the source of tension within the dynasty. There was always a danger of such provisions endangering the firm itself, especially in those dynasties where capital was scarce. Under the terms of Richard Harris II's will, his five daughters Jane, Anne, Fanny, Emily and Jessie received legacies of £9,500 each. He died in 1874 but his daughters received only a fraction of their inheritance for he had directed that £8,000 of each of these legacies was to remain in the firm of Richard Harris and Sons for 15 years. The remaining £1,500 was to be invested by Richard Harris's trustees in the usual gilt edged securities so that his daughters could be assured of a small yearly income each year which would be entirely at their disposal whether they married or not. Three of the five girls remained unmarried and maintained separate establishments in the Stoneysgate area. Of the other two, the eldest daughter married Alfred Hamel, one of the partners in Richard Harris and Sons up to about the time of her father's death, and one of the younger daughters, Emily married William Northcote Toller who also worked in the firm.

The main beneficiaries under Richard Harris's will were his two older sons and his son-in-law Alfred Hamel. As was thought fitting among the dynasty-builders, the eldest son George Shirley Harris was allotted the family portraits and paintings but his share of the estate was the same as John Dove Harris's and Alfred Hamel's. Between them, they shared Richard Harris's share in Leicester Water Works Company, his books, carriages, stock-in-trade, policies of assurance and so on and also his land at Moulton in Northamptonshire and at Ashby-de-la-Zouch in Leicestershire. The residue of the estate was divided equally between George Shirley, John Dove and Richard Harris's third son Charles Theodore. Richard Harris directed that any one of his sons might buy factories belonging to the family firm in Braunstone Gate and West Street.

The death of the eldest son George Shirley in 1876 altered the chances of both the remaining brothers. John Dove became the new head of the dynasty and Charles Theodore's status in the family and firm rose correspondingly. However, they derived no direct financial benefit for George Shirley's three children became recipients of legacies and shares originally apportioned to their father. This must have been of great importance to the remaining brothers for it seems that they were running badly into debt in the family firm at this time. They owed a great deal of money to their uncle, John Dove Harris I (having no sons of his own he had his brother's second son named after him). A sum of £24,000 is mentioned in his will.

By the late 1870s, the head of the Harris dynasty and his brother were encountering severe financial difficulties. They owed their uncle and, after his death, his estate a considerable sum of money. They had to meet an interest of $4\frac{1}{2}\%$ on the £8,000 which each of their sisters had been forced to leave invested in the firm under the terms of their father's will. What is more, George Shirley's widow withdrew capital from the firm on behalf of her children. Richard Harris had not apparently seen any need to safeguard against this by the insertion of conditions in his will similar to those which controlled his daughters' shares. In the year of their uncle's death, 1878, John Dove and his brother gave shares in the firm amounting to £23,200 to the banker, Thomas Paget, in consideration of a large overdraft which had not been paid. Another of their secured creditors was their uncle's widow: this was a mortgage of £5,400 on property adjoining the warehouse in King Street. It is not surprising that they were increasingly dependent on the support of their sisters.

In 1887 exactly fifteen years after the death of Richard Harris this support was withdrawn. A meeting of creditors was called because stock-taking a few months earlier had not shown a profit: in fact there had been no profit for five years. R. S. Mantle of Wykes Brothers and Mantle explained that this situation had come about because 'large sums of money had been written off for machinery . . . a great deal of capital had been invested in this way . . . £14,000 over the last seven or eight years . . . the firm was beset by competitors who had been principally trained by themselves . . . the brothers could show returns of £95,800 for the year 1886 . . . given their expenses a turnover of not less than £150,000 was essential'. Mantle was careful to play down the burden of paying interests on debts owing to kin: it would have been thought most improper to lay bare family dissensions in a public meeting. Nevertheless, it is probable that most of the people present saw this as being largely responsible for the state of the firm. Indeed the man who chaired the meeting (a Mr. Landlaw of Hawick who said he had done business in Leicester for forty years and never lost a penny) voiced the opinion that the five daughters of Richard Harris were not to blame for the failure of their father's firm and in denying this possibility gave it some substance. Moreover Mantle himself had said that Richard Harris had left his daughters considerable sums of money but only on the condition that they left the greater part of it in the family business. 'That was intended to benefit the firm but it had turned out one of the greatest difficulties they had to contend with'. It seems

highly likely that the withdrawal of capital from the firm by the sisters of the third head of the dynasty led to its final collapse.

With the end of the firm, the Harris dynasty as a constituent element of the elite group came to an end. The Harrises of the third generation found employment elsewhere. The eldest, John Dove Harris became a partner in a new hosiery firm which rose out of the ashes of Richard Harris and Sons. This was Harris Wright and Company; it was founded in the same year as the old firm collapsed and used premises in Braunstone Gate which once belonged to the Harris dynasty. This firm was a fair size but it went into liquidation in the next century. The younger brother, Charles Theodore Harris went into partnership with Goodman who had a cigar business in Vestry Street. He married his partner's daughter Lilley and one of his sons succeeded him in the cigar business. He died in relative poverty (considering the fortune his father left him) in 1918, leaving £2,226. The Harris dynasty was never refounded after the collapse of the firm in 1887: it fell a prey to intolerable strains produced by the dynasty-building principle itself.¹²

The dynasts of Victorian Leicester never achieved fame or notoriety outside provincial society. They were content with what this small town could offer them and, dutifully, generation by generation they shouldered the tasks expected of them within both the family and the firm. But their lives were far from dull for they believed they were constructing a new and better society for the inhabitants of the town. As Collin Ellis wrote in the preface to his mother's delightful book,

. . . 'a sort of unity emerges—the unity of a society with many common traditions and many common aims. These are the traditions of hard work and a respectable standard of living. There is the desire to see both those traditions extended to less fortunate members of the community. More remarkable, however, and very plainly evident . . . is the awakening of a whole class to the possibility of a life that could include something beyond these valued traditions'.¹³

Notes

1. James Thompson and Mrs. Fielding-Johnson were members of important dynasties while George Searson belonged to the substratum below the elite group and was of marginal membership. Greaves, Temple Patterson and Simmons are of course modern historians
2. N. Elias and J. L. Scotson, *The Established and the Outsiders* (Cass, 1965). They develop the concept of oldness in this study of a small community just outside Leicester with reference to the length of residence of a family in the village: the longer the length of residence, the greater the claim to authority. Here the concept refers to the age of the culture of the group in association with political authority which it acquired in 1836
3. *The Leicester Chronicle and Mercury*, Jan. 1868
4. Rev. Thomas Lomas, *Character and its Conquests: a Memoir of the Late R. Harris, Esquire* (Green, 1855)
5. For a detailed analysis, see my M.Phil thesis 'Business families in Victorian Leicester: a study in historical sociology' (Leicester University 1975)

6. Paget's Bank in High Street was a very important concern. It was taken by Lloyds Bank in 1895 after a period of succession problems for the dynasty
7. Information from R. J. Faire and E. Ward. A good deal of the following information has been provided very generously by other descendants of the Victorian dynasty-builders and consequently it has been thought best to omit very detailed footnotes
8. This has been pieced together from a variety of sources, wills being particularly useful
9. S. Marriner, *Rathbones of Liverpool 1845-73* (Liverpool University, 1961)
10. 'Leicester Daily Post', March 19th 1921
11. *S. Hilton and Sons Ltd. 1869-1969* (Printed privately, 1969)
12. This analysis of the Harris dynasty was constructed on the basis of wills and newspaper cuttings
13. I. C. Ellis *Records of Nineteenth Century Leicester* (Privately printed, 1935), p. 14