

**Businessmen in the British Parliament,
1832-1886**

A Study of Aspiration and Achievement

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Abstract

The businessmen who were elected to the British Parliament after the First Reform Act had not acquired country estates or rotten boroughs as had their predecessors. They were critical of the established aristocratic dominance and they had policies they wanted to promote. Few succeeded in exerting any real influence due to the entrenched power of the landed gentry, their older age when elected and their lack of public experience.

This thesis identifies six businessmen who were important contributors to national politics and were thus exceptions to the more usual parliamentary subordination to the gentry. They were generally younger when elected, they had experience in municipal government and with national agitation groups; they were intelligent and hard working. Unlike some other businessmen who unashamedly promoted sectional interests, these men saw their business activities as only incidental to their parliamentary careers. Having been in business did however provide them with some understanding of the aims of the urban working class, and it also gave them the financial backing to enter politics.

The social backgrounds and political imperatives of this group of influential businessmen and how these affected their actions are discussed in this thesis. Their successes and failures are analysed and it is argued that their positions on policy issues can be attributed to their strong beliefs rather than their business background. Reference is made to the achievements of contemporary aristocratic politicians and compared with those of the businessmen. It will be shown that, particularly during the period between the first two Reform Acts, the aristocratic ascendancy continued. However it is argued that for the businessmen to have reached the level of influence they did was a significant achievement in itself.

Declaration

I, John Michael Davey, certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

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John Michael Davey

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