



John Platt
1817-1872



James Platt
1823-1857

Opinions in the town were viciously divided. John Platt was strongly in favour of a charter and came to be the leading spokesman for those of similar persuasion, known as the Charterites. He voiced the dissatisfaction felt over the way the then authorities (Police Commissioners) were administering, or not administering, the town. Prime amongst the complaints were the lack of upkeep and control of the streets – Union Street, the main thoroughfare, he condemned as frequently being ankle deep in mud – the market traders were allowed to erect their stalls in the streets haphazardly to the general inconvenience of everyone else and, above all, the unsatisfactory water supply and sanitary arrangements were a cause for great concern. Many heated meetings occurred, at one such in the Town Hall, John Platt withdrew from the chair when proceedings fell into total disarray. Ultimately the Charterites prevailed, a Royal Charter was secured and Oldham became a Corporate Borough in 1849. John and James Platt subscribed their names to the list of persons guaranteeing to meet all the expenses incurred by the Committee which had promoted the Charter. (Their joint promise was for £100, almost one quarter of the total sum guaranteed). The first elections to the Borough Council were held in the August of 1849. John Platt was elected to represent St. James' ward which contained that part of the town in which the original Hartford Works stood. In 1854 he was made the (fourth) Mayor of Oldham, an office he was to hold twice more in 1855-56 and 1861-62. In the year he first became the Mayor he was joined on the Borough Council by James who had been elected to serve the Westwood Ward, in the north-western corner of the town in which Hartford New Works

chiefly stood. From its inception the Oldham Borough Council moved quickly to rectify the shortcomings the Charterites had proclaimed.

In politics, the Platt brothers were Liberal, in fact, they subscribed to the beliefs of the radical wing of the party; for many years John Platt was the chairman of the Oldham Radical Committee. In matters of free trade they were disciples of Cobden and Bright – John Platt had been active in the campaign for the repeal of the Corn Laws, they supported household suffrage – in this connection John Platt was President of the Oldham Freehold Society, short parliaments and the total abolition of church rates and all oaths, tests and religious disqualifications. Particularly they were in favour of education for the working classes; it has been seen already that they had taken practical steps in that direction for their own workforce before they became involved in the wider provisions in the town. In Oldham parliamentary politics the brothers were a strong force, for instance, when during the campaign for the 1847 election John Fielden – one of the retiring Liberal members – split the Radical ranks, in insisting it was his prerogative to select his running partner, John Platt powerfully supported William Fox who had been selected, as a third Liberal candidate, by those Radicals sorely exasperated with Fielden's attitude. Fox was elected (in partnership with John Duncuft) to the exclusion of Fielden. In 1857 James Platt became vitally involved in parliamentary politics when he was elected a Member of Parliament for Oldham, in company with J M Cobbett. John Platt delayed his candidacy until 1865, when he was successful, which process he repeated in 1868 and remained an MP for Oldham until his death. On both occasions he was elected in company with J T Hibbert. John Tomlinson Hibbert, later Sir John Hibbert KCB, was the eldest son of Elijah Hibbert. He was born at Lyon House, Oldham, in 1824 and educated at Shrewsbury School and St. John's College Cambridge. He was called to the Bar in 1849 and, in all, was MP for Oldham seven times. He was, also, the first chairman of the Lancashire County Council.

Towards fulfilling his belief in the need to educate the working classes, John Platt lent his support to the Mechanics Institutes in and about Oldham. These Institutes had been established, by popular demand, to impart to artisans, chiefly engaged in engineering, elementary literacy and the basic mechanical skills. He played a leading part in the provision of the new building to house the Werneth Mechanics Institute which, originally, had operated in a Sunday School room on Windsor Road. The new building was erected on the corner of Manchester and Coppice Streets and after it was opened, by William Ewart Gladstone, in 1867, the Platt Brothers' apprentices were sent there to receive, each week, a half day's course of instruction. However, the