CHAPTER 5

INSTITUTIONALISING CORNWALL: THE ROLE OF A SOCIAL ELITE

In chapters 3 and 4 we focused on the perception of individuals and groups of contemporaries in describing the transformation of the Cornish territorial identity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. We have emphasised the symbolic meanings ascribed to the notion of Cornwall and some of the ways in which these were produced, articulated and reproduced actively by different agents over time. In doing this, moreover, we have noted the key role of Cornwall's economic structure, in the centrality of its mining industry and the symbols and way of life associated with that industry.

Yet, whether stressing the structures of the mining region or highlighting the perceptions of agents, whether focussing on the context or the narratives of identities, we do not have a fully satisfactory answer to the question of 'territorial shape'. Why Cornwall? After all, there were other possible paths, other territorial identities open to people. The most obvious was an area smaller than the administrative county of Cornwall, perhaps confined to west Cornwall, the heartland of the industrial region and, as will be suggested below, the core zone of the cultural region. It was only with the expansion of mining in east Cornwall in the 1830s and 1840s that some of the cultural features of this zone extended eastwards. Nevertheless, Cornwall and the Cornish were being imagined as a unity well before those decades, at a time when deep mining east of Truro was relatively unusual. Alternatively, why did a much larger area, such as Devon and Cornwall, not become a focus for territorial identity? The growing city of

Plymouth, on the border of Cornwall, provided a potential provincial centre which, theoretically, was capable of binding a broader hinterland together. To answer this problem of territorial scale we might profitably return to Anssi Paasi's model of the institutionalisation of regions and to the element of process.

Central to Paasi's model is the way in which symbols are welded onto the territorial framework through the process of institutionalisation. As we saw in chapter 1 Paasi proposes an institutionalisation process involving four overlapping stages (Paasi, 1986, 121-129 and 1991, 243-246). One of his stages is 'the emergence of institutions', standardised, permanent modes of behaviour and fixed roles (Paasi, 1991, 245). These institutions, both formal establishments , such as the media or schools, or more informal local and non-local cultural, economic, political, legal and educational practices, link the symbols to the territory. Individuals are socialised into ideas of the region through their membership of such institutions and through the communications of such institutions. For Paasi, the role of social institutions is therefore crucial. These, defined broadly, will 'eventually be the most important factors as regards the reproduction of the region and regional consciousness' (Paasi, 1986, 121. For a similar highlighting of the role of institutions in the formation of 'ethnonationalism' see Lecours, 2000). This chapter therefore begins by identifying some of the cultural institutions which appeared during Cornwall's industrial phase and which carried the idea of 'Cornwall' to succeeding generations. Here we are discussing formal institutions rather than less formal social institutions such as the family or kin or broader cultural practices such as those attached to custom, aspects of which are touched on later in chapters 8 and 9.

However, the process of institutionalisation is inextricably linked to prevailing social hierarchies (Paasi, 1986, 110 and 114). Some groups, in particular,

specialise in 'ideas' about the region, helping to create the symbols that are attached to a particular regional territory. We have already noted the role of the Cornish clerical-antiquarian gentry in this respect in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and others have pointed out a similar role for a metropolitan class of artists and intelligentsia in relation to the changing symbolic vocabulary of Cornwall after the 1870s (Dodd, 1986, 14-15; Korey, 1992, 141 passim; Vernon, 1998). Here, we proceed from an identification of Cornwall-wide institutions to investigate the Cornish landed and middle classes, the key groups in staffing such institutions and in reproducing the territorial identity of this period.

The production of Cornish institutions

In our period we can identify three waves of Cornish institutional production. In the first wave in 1792 three initiatives sprang forth. These closely followed the attempt to form a mining cartel in the 1780s, described by Pollard (1981, 14) as 'remarkable'. In Truro in September 1792, seven gentlemen met at the Red Lion to discuss the formation of a County Library, Museum and Literary Society (Crook, 1990, 13-14). Three months later at Bodmin another select committee of seven was formed to canvass subscribers for a Cornwall Agricultural Society (Riddle, 1994, 3). Both of these societies were to enjoy long-term success, although the first eventually restricted itself to a library. The third institution was not successful. This was a proposed society 'for the general improvement of mining' (CRO M 255/6).

The second wave of institutions occurred in the 1810s. This included the Cornwall Geological Society in Penzance in 1814 and the Cornwall Philosophical Institution at Truro in 1818 (Crook, 1990, i; Freeborn, 1986, 66-67), later to receive royal patronage as the Royal Cornwall Geological Society and the Royal

Institution of Cornwall. These were two of the three 'county' literary institutions that were to dominate the intellectual life of nineteenth century Cornwall. The third society of the 1810s was more short lived, the Cornwall Physical Institution at Falmouth in 1817 or 1818 (Crook, 1990, 55). Although it did not survive, this institution managed to stake Falmouth's claim to be the home of Cornwall's third major 'county' institution, which was duly established in another wave of institutional production. In 1833 the Royal Cornwall Polytechnic Society emerged in Falmouth to encourage the self-help and inventiveness of Cornish people. Its historian, Alan Pearson, suggests that its aim was more practical than the earlier two societies, reflecting another institution that appeared in 1832, the Cornwall Horticultural Society (Pearson, 1973, 26. And see Stephens and Roderick, 1973). Between the first and second wave of Cornish institutions, a Cornish press had also emerged. In 1800 the *Royal Cornwall Gazette* began to publish. In 1810 the *West Briton* followed suit, established by reforming interests as a reaction against the Tory politics of the *Gazette*. In the nineteenth century, both newspapers, although published at Truro, attempted to provide a Cornwall-wide coverage.

These, then, were the formal institutions, organised at least in name on a Cornwall-wide basis, that appeared in the 40 or so years from 1792. They both reflected a certain level of 'county' consciousness and articulated this county consciousness through their activities. But they were also, as Paasi reminds us, products of a hierarchical society. The earlier institutions, those of the 1790s, were initiated and led by elements of the landed gentry. Indeed, Sir Francis Basset was a member of both the select committee of the Cornwall Agricultural Society and one of the promoters of the Cornwall Library and there was much overlap amongst the subscription lists of these two societies (see Riddle, 1994, 3), lists dominated by the landed and clerical-landed class. These gentry-led

institutions had been prefigured by the Cornish Club, established in London in 1768 for all 'gentlemen, connected with Cornwall, as might be temporarily or permanently residing in London, to dine together several times in every year" (CRO AD 965/2). Sir William Lemon, county MP from 1774 to 1824, was a subscriber to the Cornwall Agricultural Society and promoter of the Cornwall Library in 1792 and also one of the five founder members of the Cornish Club.

In contrast to these successful gentry-led institutions, the proposed society of 1792 to promote Cornish mining, aimed at 'agents, captains and others concerned in mines' failed to establish itself. However, by the 1830s, a few at least of this more middle class target group were involved in the activities of the Cornish literary societies. More generally, the urban professional and middle classes were increasingly present in the institutions of the second and third waves in addition to the gentry.

Did this mean that the reproduction of the symbolic ideas of Cornwall passed from the landed to the middle classes between 1790 and 1840? Mark Billinge (1984, 35-37, 45-46) proposes that the new grand bourgeoisie of the industrial regions - businessmen, together with some professional men, particularly surgeons and doctors - established literary and philosophical institutions dominated by a concern for science. The self-identity and status of the bourgeoisie was forged around these institutions.

Was the role of the Cornish literary institutions similar? Did they act in a similar manner to the institutions of the industrial regions of northern England - as foci for an emergent bourgeois culture? It would seem not. Medical men did play a crucial role in the Cornwall Geological Society in 1814 (Crook, 1990, 24), in much the same way as they did in the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society in 1781 (Billinge, 1984, 51). But, there were major differences between the Cornish societies and the northern 'lit and phils'. The first is one of timing.

The Cornish societies emerged at least a generation later than societies such as the Manchester Lit and Phil or the even earlier Birmingham Lunar Society and the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion in Wales (Crook, 1990, 1). The Cornish societies were coterminous with similar societies in provincial and 'county' towns across England. For instance, literary societies were formed in Plymouth in 1812 and Exeter in 1813.Thus, they resembled, in this respect, county literary societies rather than the self-confident societies of the industrial regions. This conclusion is reinforced by other differences.

Principal among these was the absence of dissenters in the Cornish societies. Old dissent provided a large proportion of the membership of eighteenth century English literary societies. In contrast, Crook concludes that 'only a small proportion of the membership of the Royal Cornwall Geological Society belonged to one of the dissenting groups, and none of the clergy among the members was from this group' (Crook, 1990, 71). Crook could only identify with confidence four Methodists among the 65 original members despite the dominant numerical position of Methodism in west Cornwall by this time (see below in chapter 9). The Royal Institution of Cornwall was similar and even the membership of the Royal Cornwall Polytechnic Society, despite the particular role in it of the Quaker Fox family, was dominated by Anglicans.

Socially, the Cornish institutions recorded a higher proportion of gentry and a lower proportion of businessmen than the societies of the industrial cities. Table 5.1 summarises the occupational background of two of the Cornish institutions at selected periods.

Table 5.1 : Occupations of male members of the Royal Cornwall Geological

Society and Royal Cornwall Polytechnic Society, 1818-1856 (%s)

	RCGS 1818	RCGS 1834	RCPS 1856
Gentry	26	37	27
Business	29	31	30
law and medicine	19	10	13
Clergy/army/navy	11	12	12
not known/misc	14	11	19
N	159	94	231

Source : based on Crook, 1990, 58, 166 ; RRCPS 24 (1856); Kelly's Directory,

1856.

The most numerous social group does appear to have been the professional and

business middle classes but, in contrast to the northern industrial cities, all the

Cornish societies adopted a policy of actively encouraging members of the landed

gentry to join. Here the role of the clergy and lawyers in mediating between the

county gentry on the one hand and the petty bourgeoisie (shopkeepers, small

traders and manufacturers) in the towns seems to be along the lines proposed

by Smith in his study of Birmingham and Sheffield (Smith, 1982, 8). While many

were passive patrons, some gentry, like Sir Charles Lemon, were very actively

involved in these societies. It seems that, while being broadly middle class

institutions, the Literary Societies in Cornwall were seeking additional status

(and additional funds) through their association with the gentry. The search for

status drove these societies, as it had driven the earlier societies of the industrial

cities, but in Cornwall there was a need to associate with, rather than against,

the landed class. This process is best demonstrated in the seeking and

attainment of royal patronage.

The absence of earlier, more self-confidently 'bourgeois' literary institutions in Cornwall can, of course, largely be explained by the absence of a single large and expanding industrial town where professional and business classes could congregate. The small towns of Cornwall also militated against the development of co-operative relations between the 'Lit and Phils'. Indeed, proposals in 1842 that the three senior Cornish societies should unite to form an 'Association of Cornish Societies', with some joint meetings, fell on stony ground following hardly any response from the other two societies (Crook, 1990, 48). The urban middle classes in Cornwall were unable to overcome their parochial interests to give a clear institutional form to their territorial identity. In terms of institutional formation, their more local place identities would seem to have outweighed their Cornish identity.

Finally, Crook points out that, in the Manchester Lit and Phil, 56 per cent of members were manufacturers and merchants in 1809-11, a proportion matched in similar societies in the Potteries and Yorkshire. The proportion of active businessmen was far lower in the Cornish societies (Crook, 1990, 63-64). In particular, there was a notable absence of those directly involved in mining, despite its central role in Cornish society. And yet Crook also notes that, despite only 3 per cent of the original members of the Royal Cornwall Geological Society in 1814 being mining professionals, 'more than half the members were involved financially in mining affairs; many more may well have held shares in mining ventures' (Crook, 1990, 55). The apparent absence of direct links with mining does not mean, therefore, that the Cornish societies escaped the influence of mining. Indeed, this paradox reflects the nature of the 'mining interest' in Cornwall. Moreover, the expanding mining industry had added to the ranks of the Cornish social elite.

Cornwall's merchant bourgeoisie

As early as 1778 William Pryce was noting that 'it is the popular opinion that no real surplusage beyond the charges of mining do arise to the adventurers in general' (Pryce, 1778, xii). Three quarters of a century later Leifchild was working the same vein of pessimism: 'in Cornwall, as elsewhere, it is known to the well-informed, that mines in the aggregate are a losing concern' (Leifchild, 1857, 245). Yet it is possible to find others who were arguing the reverse, that mining offered a profitable investment opportunity to match any other (Phillips and Darlington, 1857, 197). Pryce himself was sceptical of the arguments of the pessimists, commenting upon the 'opulent fortunes' made by some, and Borlase, also writing in the eighteenth century, was conscious of the 'great fortunes [that] have been raised to adventurers' (Pryce, 1778, xii; Borlase, 1758, 206). Other commentators have explained an apparent paradoxical lack of aggregate profitability alongside continued investment in Cornish mining by pointing to the role of local merchants who were also adventurers. They could profit, even from a failing concern, through monopolising supplies of materials (Burt, 1984, 80-83. And see Buckley, 1992a, 23). This view was also implied at the Commons Committee investigating the Copper Trade in 1799 when John Vivian, in giving evidence, went out of his way to argue that merchants did not dominate copper mines (BPP, 1799, 159-163). Whether they did or not, and Vivian's presentation was somewhat disingenuous in its classification of 'merchants', some people clearly did make money, a lot of money, out of Cornish mining. And the really large gainers were more than likely to have had a diversified portfolio of interests as merchants, smelters and bankers.

By the end of the eighteenth century a group of merchants, along with some of the landed gentry, were major shareholders in copper mining. Foremost among them was the Williams family, originating as tinners in Stithians in the

seventeenth century. By the early eighteenth century John Williams (c1684-1761), who had moved to Gwennap, at the centre of the expanding copper industry, was the manager of Poldice mine and heavily involved in the building of the Great County Adit. Buckley (1992a, 16) claims that, by 1800, the Williams family 'controlled or managed over a quarter of the copper mines in Cornwall'. John Williams' grandson, also named John (1753-1841), moved from mine management into other fields, establishing, in 1822, the partnership of Fox, Williams, Grenfell and Co., later Williams, Foster and Co., which invested in copper smelting in Swansea and opened places of business in London, Liverpool, Manchester and Birmingham. By 1840 the company's capital was £400,000 and John Michael Williams, who left £1.6 million in his will in 1880, was described as 'probably the most wealthy man in Cornwall' (Boase, 1890, 1252).

The Williamses had moved from mines management and adventuring in the eighteenth century into smelting, banking and other trades in the nineteenth century. Their counterparts, the Bolithos, equally dominant in tin mining by the 1840s, had moved in the opposite direction. Before 1740, this family had come from Penryn, where they had been tanners and merchants, to Madron, near Penzance. There Thomas Bolitho (1765-1858) had leased lime pits and, by 1805, joined in a partnership which owned the tin smelting works at Chyandour. In 1810 Bolitho Sons and Co. were involved in tin smelting, shipowning, dealing in hemp, cordage and tallow and the export of pilchards (Barton, 1967, 24). However, their most significant move was into banking. In 1807 they established the Mounts Bay Commercial Bank and entered into partnership in the East Cornwall Bank, based at Liskeard. From this base they then bought shares in various tin mines. By 1885 the family was wealthy enough to be described as the 'merchant princes' of Cornwall (*Cornish Magazine and Devon Miscellany*, cited in Boase, 1890, 1332-1340).

Other merchants prospered from the general increase in trade associated with mining expansion. The Fox family had moved west from Fowey to the growing port of Falmouth sometime in the early eighteenth century. Making money from pilchard exports and the timber trade, the Foxes had become major investors in Cornish mining by the 1790s (Gill, 1995, 37) as well as leading a consortium that built an iron foundry at Perranarworthal. They had also formed the Portreath Company, which worked Cornwall's first railway, linking the harbour at Portreath to the Gwennap mines (Barton, 1961, 49). Investing widely in various mines from the 1780s to the 1840s, and being the principal financiers for the restarting of Dolcoath in 1799, the Foxes showed considerable foresight in pulling out of mining in the later 1840s (Barton, 1961, 112).

This pattern, either from mines management and investment into banking and smelting, or from general merchanting into mines investment and smelting and/or banking, was followed by many other families. William Davey of Redruth was a solicitor and manager of Consols Mine in nearby Gwennap in 1819. His sons, Stephen and Richard, major mines adventurers in the 1840s, were cited by Rowe as an example of the managerial class in mining, 'risen to the highest ranks of county society' (Rowe, 1953, 24). While this family and others followed the first path noted above, from mines management into banking and merchanting, perhaps more common was the second route. Examples include Thomas Daniell, who succeeded to some of William Lemon's business interests around 1760 and became the 'head of the great Truro merchant dynasty' (Barton, 1967, 22 and Rowe, 1953, 59). His successor, Ralph Allen Daniell gained large profits from Great Towan at St.Agnes in the late eighteenth century and had 'considerable interests in the Gwennap mines', while remaining 'primarily a Truro merchant' (Barton, 1961, 156). In the productive copper mining country at St.Day, east of Redruth, Collan Harvey (1770-1846), a cooper

who diversified his interests to became a grocer, ironmonger, mathematical instrument dealer and flour merchant in partnership with his brother James, also became a successful mines adventurer and a partner in Williams, Foster and Co. for a time, as well as having a concern in Portreath harbour with the Foxes and Williamses. In turn, his son Richard (1808-70) became a partner in Williams, Harvey and Co, one of the leading tin smelters in Cornwall after 1837. At his death he left 'half of a million of money' (Boase, 1890, 328-330). The Fosters of Lostwithiel, tanners, merchants and bankers from 1807, also became involved in smelting - evidence that the fertility of mining could bear fruit even outside the principal mining districts (Boase, 1890, 258).

The merchant bourgeoisie and the gentry

This merchant middle class was located primarily in and near the towns of Truro, Falmouth and Penzance, together with Redruth and Gwennap. No doubt it was geographical proximity that aided their networking. In the tin mining industry in particular, Barton has claimed that by the 1840s the smelters were totally dominant, 'a tightly knit group no outsider could penetrate' (Barton, 1967, 76). It was also the merchant middle classes in places like Truro and Penryn who were prominent in the signs of 'voter independence' that Jaggard (1999, 60) detects in these boroughs before 1800. But, at the same time as this group remained tightly knit in trade, sometimes cementing their commercial alliance by intermarriage, they were also marked by a progressive fusion with the landed interests - a fusion made easier by the mercantile source of much of their wealth.

Within three generations at the most, the merchant families we have noted had bought their landed estate, in the process sometimes moving away from the district in which they had made their wealth. The Bolithos did stay in the

Penzance area but, in 1866, Thomas Simon Bolitho, grandson of the first Thomas who had moved to Madron, brought Trengwainton House, which had been built by Sir Rose Price in 1814 from the profits of Jamaica sugar plantations. And Thomas Simon Bolitho's son, Thomas Robins Bolitho, in the 1850s and 1860s enjoyed an education befitting a landed gentlemen, at Harrow and Oxford (Boase, 1890, 1332-1340). In the early nineteenth century the Foxes of Falmouth were busily 'becoming country gentlemen' as they spread across the pleasant south-facing countryside along the Helford estuary, building or buying the houses of Trebah, Penjerrick and Glendurgan (Boase, 1890, 160-162). Michael Williams, the second son of the founder of Williams, Foster and Co., made the symbolic shift away from the Gwennap district in 1854 by becoming the owner of Caerhayes Castle on the south coast. Michael's son, John Michael (1813-80) was educated at Charterhouse and bought landed estates at Grampound, St.Columb and Wadebridge. In a similar move Stephen Davey of Redruth had decanted to Bochym Manor in Cury by the 1860s and sent his sons to Harrow and Oxford. Richard Harvey, son of Collan, bought the manors of Galmpton, near Brixham and Greenway, near Dartmouth, both in South Devon and many miles from Pengreep in Gwennap, where his father had died within a mile or two of the mines that had brought the family their fortunes (Boase, 1890, 191, 330).

Therefore, the Cornish merchant bourgeoisie in the first half of the nineteenth century followed a familiar path of gentrification, culturally aping the landed gentry, becoming their neighbours, sending their sons to their schools. In Cornwall there was nothing spectacularly new or different about this. This was a path already trodden by the Lemon family, who, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, had gone in three generations from mines adventuring to a seat in Parliament, baronetcy and a country house, via banking and mercantile

interests in Truro. And Veronica Chesher has argued that in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries there were 'probably more nouveau riche … than in almost any other county' as families such as the Carlyons and Gregors used the money made from tin and trade to ease their way into membership of the landed gentry (Chesher, 1957, 11, 19).

Moreover, this movement from trade to land was not only in one direction. Chesher points out that mining opportunities drew in 'old' families too; as these used their resources to invest heavily in non-agricultural activities in eighteenth century Cornwall. The Bassets of Tehidy made £134,000 from mining between 1723 and 1760 while Samuel Enys took £20,000 profit from the same source in 25 years (Chesher, 1957, 211). Chesher concludes that 'the scale of living of both (these) families was lifted on to a new level'. This was no icing on the cake as Chesher's statistics suggest that the Bassets' profits from mining exceeded all their other revenues in the period she examined by around 32 per cent. The involvement of the landed interest in industrial activity suggests an early convergence of economic interests between it and the rising merchant class. This served to ease the status accession of the latter.

Nevertheless, differences remained between the landed gentry and the merchant bourgeoisie in early nineteenth century Cornwall, however much the latter aspired to the culture of the former and the former benefited from the economics of the latter. Most important, the majority of the landed gentry remained a rentier class. Rents from land usually remained the most important source of income. On the other hand, the bourgeoisie, however grand, could always fall victim to bankruptcy when the mining market moved against their investments. For example the Gundry family built up a major merchanting business in the village of Goldsithney during the later eighteenth century. They became heavily engaged in mining in the Breage and Lelant areas with some

interests in smelting and banking. However, the crash of 1814/15 hit them hard and continuing difficulties with the Wheal Vor flotation forced them into bankruptcy in 1820. Even merchant dynasties like the Daniells were not immune. Ralph Allen Daniell's son, Thomas, found himself in financial difficulties by 1828, just two years after serving a term as County Sheriff and, to escape bankruptcy proceedings, he was forced to flee to Boulogne (Barton, 1967, 55). The shadowy presence of the bankruptcy court indicates a continuing distinction in culture and values between the landed and the bourgeois class in early nineteenth century Cornwall. But in addition it acted as an active spur to the latter to evolve a less risk-taking, more diversified resource base, preferably one buttressed by the apparent solidity and prestige of land.

However, in the meantime, the values of the merchant-bourgeoisie - of commerce, market relations (albeit oligopolistic), enterprise and risk-taking – had became the dominant values of Cornish society in the later eighteenth century. By 1812 the 'Associated Tinners' were able to stop landowners leasing smelting houses to unwelcome up-country interests, suggesting that hegemonic power rested with this mercantile class (Barton, 1967, 35). And yet, while gaining this economic dominance the mercantile class had adopted many mores of the landed gentry. At the same time local political power remained firmly with the latter.

Beckett has suggested that the first step for the ambitious merchant seeking entry into the landed gentry was 'to accept the post of sheriff, a prestigious but expensive and time-consuming position that the local gentry preferred to avoid'. In both Shropshire and Cumberland merchants and traders held this post intermittently from 1725 (Beckett, 1986, 122). But in Cornwall the first merchant who can be identified acting as sheriff is Ralph Allen Daniell in 1795. But by then he was living the life of a country gentleman at Trelissick in Feock. In 1803,

Thomas Rawlings, a Padstow merchant, and in 1810 Richard Oxnam of Penzance served as sheriffs (Polsue, 1867-73, supplementary papers, 133-135). Both these men were bankrupt by 1820. It was not until much later, in the 1850s and 1860s, that the Williamses, Fosters and Bolithos appeared in the list of sheriffs.

The Cornish merchant bourgeoisie were also slow to gain that other measure of social acceptance and political power, a place on the County bench. It was, according to Beckett, 'unthinkable' before 1850 for an individual to 'remain active in commerce or manufacturing' and be on the bench (1986, 126), although he cites some exceptions to this in areas where the gentry were few, notably Gloucester-shire, south Wales and Cumberland (1986, 122,123). Cotton merchants and masters began to come onto the Lancashire bench in large numbers after 1832, but more usually the proportions of businessmen on county benches were smaller; only 11 per cent of Justices of the Peace in Caernarfon, Derbyshire, Westmorland, Hertfordshire and Somerset were engaged in trade in 1867. In mid-century Cornwall the proportions did not reach even that figure. There were just eleven identifiable merchant-bourgeoisie amongst Cornwall's JPs in 1856, or 8 per cent of the total, heavily outnumbered by the 20 per cent who were clerical magistrates (Kelly, 1856). By this date the Williamses and Bolithos had attained the bench, as had the Davey brothers of Redruth, Richard Foster of Lostwithiel, Joseph Carne, the Penzance banker and merchant, Edward Coode jr, John Magor and Humphrey Willyams - the last three all bankers. By 1873 the proportion of merchant-bourgeoisie had not increased. In fact numbers stuck at eleven, now representing just 7.5 per cent of the 146 county magistrates. And of these eleven magistrates, the Bolitho and Williams families contributed five.

Thus, while there was considerable fusion of economic interests between the landed class and merchant-bourgeoisie, the power of the latter was exercised mainly in the economic sphere; and even then only rarely as direct employers of

large numbers of workers. Culturally and politically, the Cornish merchant-bourgeoisie can hardly be said to have wrested power away from the landed class. And this helps to explain why the landed classes' representations of Cornwall, their 'county' identity, with its formal expressions in the 'county' literary institutions, remained so important. In a similar way, the clerical-antiquarian view of Cornwall also retained a cultural dominance as both merchant-bourgeoisie and small town professionals and tradesmen adopted and shared the images of the landed class.

The mining interest

Indeed, when seeking the most influential groups in the institutionalisation of Cornwall, we are forced back to the concept of a hegemonic mining 'interest' in Cornwall rather than a dominant class or group. Burt defines the 'mining interest' as those 'investing capital made from long standing family connections with the industry' and classifies these separately from smelters and local landowners (Burt, 1984, 70). However, as Burt also points out, because of the difficulty of distinguishing amongst a 'wide range of interests, held by the same individual or family' ... the 'classification of speculators as smelters, merchants, landowners, traders or industrialists [is] essentially an arbitrary one' (Burt, 1984, 60). This is an important point as it suggests that the one thing in common to this group of large and small capitalists was an interest in mining. Even if, as was often the case, individual fractions were in conflict – for example smelters against investors in mines or those who made their profits selling to the mines against those who looked to profits from the production of mines - it seems that the mining interest (defined more broadly as a loose alliance of landowners, smelters and other mines adventurers) acted to weld together the different fractions of capital socially and culturally.

Within this broad 'mining interest', the merchant-bourgeoisie were economically dominant, reserving to themselves the bulk of the surplus wealth generated by mining. But socially and culturally, they merged into the background, abdicating social control and political power to the traditional landed gentry in the countryside and to the professionals and petty bourgeoisie in the towns. In this respect, Cornwall in the 1830s resembles the picture of Bradford in 1805 painted by Theodore Koditschek (1990). He notes that Bradford on the eve of its 'urban-industrial' revolution was a place where merchants had abdicated social control to the landed elite. Nevertheless, by the 1840s the expansion of mining, together with the institutionalisation of Methodism, was helping to produce a more genuinely self-confident and self-contained middle class.

Mine captains - the making of a Cornish middle class

As mines became larger and more capitalised, the need for a managerial class became greater. Mine captains fulfilled this role. Hitchins and Drew summed up their role in 1824:

> The subordinate management of the mines is consigned to the care of captains; the number of whom increases in proportion to the size of the concern. It is their business to inspect the various departments of the work; to see that the men employed are properly distributed; to notice their industry or idleness; to observe the increase or the decline of the prospects before them; to regulate the price of labour according to the hardness or softness of the ground; and to mark the variations which appear. It is also their business to see that the more dangerous parts are sufficiently propped with timber; that some men are employed in making new discoveries, while others are raising ore to meet the common expenditure; to notice the consumption of candles and gunpowder, and the injury done to the working tools; to see that the stopes and levels are fairly worked; that the channels conveying the water are in a state of

repair, and that they conduct their various streams to the engine shaft, from which it is raised from the mine; to observe that there is neither a deficiency nor an unnecessary waste of materials; and to take care that no fraud is committed in the private distribution of the ore that is broken. It must be obvious that these captains sustain offices of high responsibility (Hitchins and Drew, 1824, 613-614).

By the second quarter of the nineteenth century this subaltern class, given a large amount of autonomy and with control over the labour process, occupied a strategic position, not just in mines management, but also in wider Cornish society. As Burt points out, captains played a patriarchal role in mining communities. Becoming a mine captain was the main avenue of such mobility open to an ambitious working miner in the period of mining expansion. However, because of their origin as working miners, they retained a blunt, down-to-earth straightforwardness (Burt, 1984, 109). Mine captains, with their own experience of social and geographical mobility, espoused an ideology of personal independence, buttressed by their widespread allegiance to Methodism. They practised a rough form of social egalitarianism, but one welded to authoritarian and hierarchical relations with the working miners. This distinctiveness (personally independent, socially egalitarian, yet patriarchal) clearly resonated closely with the representation of Cornwall as 'industrial civilisation' that we identified in chapter 3.

Indeed, whereas the merchant-bourgeoisie had melded fairly unproblematically with the landed gentry in a mutually beneficial compromise, relations between mine captains and the landed/merchant-bourgeoisie coalition tended to be much more prickly. Two case studies can be used to indicate the nature of these relations.

The first is a painting. In 1786 the Cornish painter John Opie completed a portrait showing Thomas Daniell, the Truro merchant and smelter and a 'Captain

Figure 5.1: 'Gentleman and a Miner', by John Opie, 1786.

Morcom'. This was entitled 'Gentleman and a Miner' (See Figure 5.1. This painting is used on the back dust cover of Rowe, 1993. The original is at the Cornwall Museum). Daniell holds in the palm of his hand a large lump of ore. Morcom stands, finger pointing. He may be making a reference to the engine house silhouetted in the background, smoke belching from its stack. Or he may be emphasising a technical or geological point to Daniell. Morcom, however, is the dominant figure, dynamic and direct, apparently fixing Daniell with his gaze. Daniell, on the other hand, looks past Morcom passively. The relations suggested by Opie show no hint of deference. Daniell may be a gentleman but Morcom is represented as approaching him in the same way that he would, presumably, approach anyone who needed to be told something about mining. The two share the painting but somehow they do not engage with each other: Daniell appears to be gazing into the future and the family mansion at Trelissick along the quiet

waters of the Fal, preferring to look away from the source of his wealth, the engine house and away from the eager, pushy Morcom.

The failure of easy communication between merchant-bourgeois and mine captain implied in Opie's painting echoes the relations of the two social classes within the county institutions of the late 1830s and 1840s. The low numbers of mining professionals joining the county societies was a subject of regret for the Royal Geological Society of Cornwall in 1841: 'the contributions of our intelligent mine agents and miners, both to the Society's museum and to its transactions, have been unusually few' (TRGSC, 1841, 15). As a result the society offered a premium for 'information of new and interesting facts connected with the mines'. But in 1843 it was reported that these 'have not drawn from the agents or from the miners the communications which the Society has been anxious to obtain' (TRGSC, 1843, 24). In 1847 the Society introduced a 'second class' membership, 'to enlist into their service the practical portions of our mining population'. However, despite the fact that 'since that time no efforts have been spared to induce such persons to join us in carrying out the intentions of the society … our efforts have had only partial success' (TRGSC, 1848, 19). But, in 1849, a success was finally reported:

> The council have also to report the reception of some communications on the mineral deposits of the county, from persons whom they are particularly desirous of encouraging - the working miners, many of whom, from the nature of their occupation, must possess much valuable information. The council gladly welcome these communications; but, in doing so, they would intimate that they are much more anxious to obtain facts than theories. The latter can be useful only when they are based on a large accumulation of facts; but they are more likely to retard than to aid the progress of science, when they have only a few insulated facts for their foundation (TRGSC, 1849, 15-16).

Mine captains, therefore, could communicate but within certain limits. Sticking to facts was acceptable. Theory was reserved for the first class of members and for gentlemen! The Royal Geological Society seems to have had a genuine inability to realise that its implicit assumptions about social class were inhibiting its dialogue with the mine captains. The Society was, in the final analysis, unable to transgress the social class boundaries involved.

A few years before this, the establishment of a mining school had been suggested, first by John Taylor in 1829 and then again by Sir Charles Lemon in 1838. He had 'contacted mining agents with a proposal that he would bear the expenses of such an institution for two years' (Burt, 1984, 126; Keane, 1974). The Royal Institution of Cornwall at Truro made its premises available for the use of the School. However, as a succession of mine agents initiated resolutions against a proposed tax of a farthing in the £ on metallic materials to fund the school, the plan failed. The agents' opposition may have been connected with the proviso of Sir Charles that 'the college should be essentially a Church of England establishment'. This, and the location of the classes at Truro, at a distance from the main mining districts, guaranteed its collapse.

Other attempts by the RIC in the later 1850s were equally unsuccessful. It was only after the intervention of Robert Hunt and Robert Were Fox, of the Royal Cornwall Polytechnic Society, that eventually a Mining School was successfully launched. The difference this time was that a new organisation was to run it, and not one of the county societies. That organisation was itself to be managed by the mine captains. The inaugural meeting, significantly enough in the central mining district itself, at Camborne in October 1859, established a Mining Association of Cornwall and Devonshire, which went on to 'promote classes in elementary sciences connected with mining' (Keane, 1974, 275).

The story of the formation of the Mining Association is well known. But what previous commentators have failed to address is the formal title of the Association. Why Cornwall and Devon? In this instance the borders of an institution most closely linked with the mining industry were not coterminous with the borders of Cornwall. An explanation for this might be tentatively offered. The mine captains may have been ambiguous about the dominant historical idea of Cornwall, reproduced by the literate elite, one linked to the landed clerical-intelligentsia and the existing county societies. By encompassing Devon, even though in practice 'the Association was to be almost entirely a Cornish venture' (Keane, 1974, 289), the mine captains were doing two things. First, they were distancing themselves from the county elite who thought only in 'county' terms. And second, by including Devon they were saying that the mining region was larger than Cornwall alone. Indeed, Cornish mining did spill over the border into Devon. The mine captains were staking a claim on that west Devon part of the industry but, and here the name of the institution - Cornwall and Devon - implies the relationship, one in which Cornwall was very much the senior partner. The still expanding industry of mining was not to be limited to old historical boundaries. County boundaries were assumed to be irrelevant to the new economic region. In saying this the mine captains came closer to the idea of Cornwall as an 'industrial region', something we will explore further in the next chapter, than did either the old county landed elite or its newer partners, the merchant-bourgeoisie.

Conclusion

We have argued in this chapter that, between the 1790s and the 1830s, new cultural institutions appeared in Cornwall. These institutions helped to reproduce ideas of Cornwall. In terms of Paasi's model they were instrumental in giving

'symbolic shape' to Cornwall. Within them the landed gentry and their values continued to play a large, indeed dominant, role. This was despite the emergence of a recognisable Cornish 'merchant-bourgeoisie' during the eighteenth century. However, this merchant class, although gaining considerable economic power, did not confront local landed interests. On the contrary, by the early nineteenth century there was a growing fusion between merchant-bourgeoisie and gentry, with the former undergoing a process of gentrification and the latter using profits from mining and commerce to supplement their rent rolls. In this respect, the Cornish merchant bourgeoisie did not occupy the same social role as the self-confident business classes of industrial regions in the north of England. In Cornwall before the 1840s, formal political power remained in the hands of the traditional landed elite, albeit an elite with especially porous boundaries.

However, we have also suggested that a potentially more distinctively Cornish middle class emerged at the end of the eighteenth century. At its core were the mine captains, occupying a strategically important supervisory role, controlling labour in the dominant mining industry. Patronised by the landed class and their urban agents in the professions, mine captains were themselves discovering an institutional voice by the 1850s. Moreover, as we shall see in chapter 9, this added to their crucial role in another formal institution, the Wesleyan Methodist Connexion and its various offshoots, an institution that had a more pervasive effect upon the lives of local communities than the county literary institutions and their small town imitators.

It was this social group, together with other industrial families, that spawned a new generation who, towards the end of the century, played a leading role in the new regional framework (Paasi's final stage) of Bishopric and County Council. (Thomas, 2001, 167 remarks on the new middle class that emerged after 1800,

'mostly involved with mining, engineering and smelting'). However, the self-confidence of this incipient Cornish middle class was heavily dependent on the fortunes of the industry that begot it – mining. By looking in more comparative detail at Cornwall's economic history in this period we will both provide a context for the emergence of this class and the reformulated Cornish identity and place Cornwall's industrial period in a wider comparative perspective.