The liberal middle classes and politics in three provincial towns: Newcastle, Bristol and York - c.1812-1841.

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THE LIBERAL MIDDLE CLASSES AND POLITICS IN THREE PROVINCIAL TOWNS - NEWCASTLE, BRISTOL, AND YORK - c.1812-1841

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This thesis analyses the interaction between events and ideas at the political centre, and the actions and preoccupations of individuals in 'the world beyond Westminster'. Each chapter brings into focus key aspects of national political issues through the mechanism of detailed local studies. The choice of dates allows a contrast to be made between political organization before and after 1832. The collective label of the 'liberal middle classes' is used as an umbrella term, and recognizes the fragile identity of the middle classes in the context of formal politics. Political clubs such as the Newcastle Fox Club, the York Whig Club, the Northern Political Union, and the Bristol Liberal Association are studied in detail, enabling conclusions to be drawn about the national and local tensions within the whig party in the early nineteenth century. There was a growing provincial impatience at whig conservatism before 1832 but, with reformers divided, it proved difficult to achieve a national momentum sufficiently powerful to bring about substantial change. Bristol, for example, was comparatively backward in its reform endeavours.

Local traditions, family alliances, the nature of the regional economy, and class connections everywhere gave politics a distinctive local character. Comparisons are made between political developments at Newcastle, Bristol, and York, during the reform crisis of 1830-32. Each was a leading provincial town which had been an important pre-industrial centre. Each had an established sense of civic pride and traditions, and a rich urban culture. The impact of reform newspapers, and the role of the liberal middle classes in a range of provincial charitable, cultural, and religious organizations, receive separate attention. Three final chapters address aspects of politics in the 1830's. The conflicting pressures upon one individual are explored in a chapter on 'John Fife and Newcastle politics'. The chapter devoted to Bristol analyses how well whigs and liberals responded to the organizational requirements of the 1830's, and an account of York politics after 1832 demonstrates the continuing influence of freemen in corporate boroughs.
Acknowledgements:

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INTRODUCTION

When the world of 'high politics' met provincial public opinion in the early nineteenth century, the encounter could require careful thought and preparation on both sides. The Irish poet Thomas Moore recorded the following conversation with Lord Lansdowne, in his journal in November 1831, which related to a public dinner that was to take place in Devizes:

"Asked me how far I thought they would expect him to communicate on the subject of Reform, as it was rather a ticklish thing for him (being the only one of the ministers thus brought en evidence during the recess) so to manage as to send his hearers away satisfied without at the same time too much committing himself... He added that his colleagues were rather uneasy on the subject. - Told him that I thought his true policy was, at all events, not to be too short with them - so he but said a good deal he need not tell them anything. They would go away with the impression that he had been very communicative..."

The plan apparently worked, as Lansdowne's speech went down very well with his audience. However, the influence on such occasions was by no means one way. Political dinners such as these provided an ideal opportunity for whig leaders to sound out public opinion, and Lansdowne forwarded a detailed report on the state of opinion in Wiltshire to Lord Grey. Much communication had enabled him to "pretty accurately ascertain the state of feeling about reform" in the country. Lansdowne reported that the gentry were fairly equally divided, the middle classes were "in the proportion of four or five to one for the bill as it was", whilst the lower orders were nearly unanimous for any change. Recent studies of nineteenth century politics have tended to focus upon the actions and tactics of the political elite at Westminster, whilst the inchoate forces of 'public opinion', the 'people', and the 'middle classes' have been pushed to the periphery. Politicians did not act in a vacuum, however, and the influence of public meetings, dinners, constituency organizations, petitions, press agitation, and opinion, were a part of the political process. This study will explore the
interaction between events and ideas at the centre, and the actions and preoccupations of individuals in "the world beyond Westminster." 

The whig party in the early nineteenth century, forced to re-align itself after the crises brought about by the French Revolution and the death of Charles James Fox, was being pushed, often reluctantly, in a reformist direction. Interlinked elements in this process included the cumulative impact of articles by the Edinburgh Reviewers, the intellectual impetus provided by political economists such as Bentham, Ricardo, Mill, and Malthus, and the maturing ideas of a younger generation of whigs who increasingly favoured more forward looking policies. Men like Lord Milton became convinced that Britain's government was no longer representative and that a change was necessary. He wrote in March 1827:

"A perfect concordance between the people and their representatives is more than even Utopia can promise us, but when, as at present, there is a perfect discordance, we may be sure there is something wrong". 

During the reign of George III a number of issues of widespread popular interest were injected into the national political arena such as the Wilkes Controversy, the American War of Independence, the Fox-North Coalition, and the French Revolution and war against France. The latter events, in particular, brought about a re-definition of political parties both in parliament, and in the country, and promoted the idea that the whig party should be a political force in the country, and through public opinion, rather than merely a parliamentary faction. Francis Jeffrey, editor of the Edinburgh Review, and other contributors to the quarterly periodical advocated a mediating role for whiggism between the forces of conservatism and radicalism, and a harnessing of the respectable middle classes to their cause. At the same time a progressive broadening of articulate political consciousness was taking place. Analyses of local political behaviour in towns in the late eighteenth century have demonstrated the vitality of popular politics, and a politically conscious electorate that participated in a sophisticated local political culture.

The ideas associated with the revolution in France stimulated critiques of the existing political system in Britain and led to the formation of societies agitating for reforms. According to Cookson, "war... changed the dull ache of provincial middle class grievance into testy indignation". The war was economically
damaging to many members of the middle classes with the high cost of 
credit, and lost export markets. In the face of Pitt's wartime 
taxation, with its curbs on the consumption of consumer goods, there 
began to be attacks on aristocratic indulgence and political incom- 
petence. There was a strong feeling in some quarters that taxation 
was wilfully increased by extravagant spending on defence and admini-
stration and that the middle classes were bearing the brunt of the 
burden. Moreover, a developing sense of exclusion and resentment 
was felt by religious dissenters.\textsuperscript{10} It should be noted in qualifi-
cation of these arguments, however, that the Anti-war movement never 
recruited the majority of the middle classes. Loyalism was more 
widely supported than the peace movement.\textsuperscript{11}

Eighteenth century constitutional theory made the government 
to some degree sensitive to public opinion and the sentiments of 
the electorate. Edmund Burke's celebrated speech to the electors 
of Bristol in 1774 explaining that, as their M.P. he was a repre-
sentative not their delegate, did, nonetheless, explicitly acknow-
ledge his obligations towards the 'people' in general and his con-
stituents in particular. The latter, in turn, showed their readiness 
to assess his unpopular performance as their representative by engin-
eering his withdrawal from the Bristol seat at the election of 1780, 
to great local applause.\textsuperscript{12} Yet the idea that external opinion was 
insufficiently recognized by the legislature acquired substantial 
additional force in the early nineteenth century, as a greater 
number of individuals became politically active. James Mackintosh 
put it thus in the \textit{Edinburgh Review} in 1818:

"The number of those who take an interest in political 
affairs has increased with a rapidity formerly unknown. 
The political public has become not only far more numer-
ous, but more intelligent, more ardent, more bold, and 
more active. During the last thirty years its numbers 
have been increased more perhaps than in any equal 
period since the Reformation, by the diffusion of know-
ledge, by the pressure of public distress, and by the 
magnitude of revolutions. (13)

The great sea-change in the power of public opinion after the wars 
against France was equally discernable to tory leaders such as 
George Canning and Robert Peel. Canning spoke of it in December 
1819,

"as possessing now tenfold force at the present compared 
with former times. Not only was public opinion advanced, 
but its power was accumulated, and conveyed by appro-
priate organs, and made to bear upon legislation and
government, upon the conduct of individuals, and upon the proceedings of both Houses of Parliament". (14)

The early chapters of this study describe and analyse the national and local strains within the whig party in the late 1810's and 1820's as it attempted to forge a new sense of direction and identity. There were conflicting views as to how the whigs should handle public opinion. Conservative whigs regarded opinion out of doors as a useful check upon the encroachment of government and the influence of the crown, but confined its scope to the propertied and educated classes, and to carefully controlled county meetings rather than the newspapers. More forward looking whigs were prepared to see public opinion as a dynamic force which could take the initiative, and to make alliances with grass roots liberals.

Parliamentary reform was an issue which divided aristocratic whigs at the highest level. The Duke of Bedford, for example, wrote to Lord Holland in January 1817:

"The great body of the whigs must not fight shy of parliamentary reform, or we shall lose ourselves with the country forever. The Fitzwilliamites and anti-reformers may take their own line, but this must not deter us from advocating those measures to which the public looks as a preliminary step to a redress of all our grievances".

But Lord Lauderdale at about the same time was alarmed that Grey appeared to place so much emphasis upon parliamentary reform. He illustrated the absurdity of reform in his eyes by quoting Lord Grey's observation that the greatest advantage of reform would be the destruction of men of substantial electoral influence such as,

"The D. of Beaufort, Lord Lonsdale, Sir P. Hawkins, etc. etc;... seemingly forgetting... that in these etc... etc... etc's included Lord Darlington, Lord Fitzwilliam and the Duke of Bedford, the three people he meant to visit on his way up [to London], with many others the loss of whose influence he would regret as much as me". (15)

Grey's perhaps understandable hesitation and haverering on the question of parliamentary reform created impatience amongst both rank and file liberals and his parliamentary colleagues. A youthful Lord John Russell went so far as to ask of Lord Holland in 1810,

"I wish you would be as good as to explain the difference between Ld. Liverpool and Ld. Grey on the subject of Reform".
In a much less pointed manner, some years later, Holland himself pressed Grey for greater clarity of definition as to what the whigs stood for:

"The country is in a state where we are really called upon to disband ourselves as a party, or to act together upon some plain, broad, and intelligible principle which would explain to the court and the public the difference of system they would pursue from the tories!" (16)

This was a fundamental question upon which provincial whigs and liberals naturally had their own ideas, and demanded a voice. Yet the fusion of popular political culture and of high politics was often an awkward fit, as each party had different expectations. There was, moreover, a complex interplay between all of the groups and social classes that had a stake in the extra-parliamentary terrain.

The relationship between local and national politics was being transformed during this period. In the eighteenth century, political movements in British towns had little central direction, and involved almost no co-ordination of activity with like-minded groups in other places. The main focus of attention tended to be upon problems and contentions of the immediate area. Increasingly, in the early nineteenth century, provincial energies were harnessed to national objectives. Nationalizing forces at work included the expanding circulation of newspapers, improvements in systems of transportation, the spread of urbanization and industrialization, and the gradual impact of improved education. On the other hand, political behaviour was not uniform across all areas of the country. Towns were rarely mere mirrors of national trends, since these were refracted by indigenous culture and traditions, and the regional economic structure. Local traditions, family alliances, and class connections, everywhere gave politics a distinctive local character and this study balances the need for a national perspective with the requirement for detailed local studies. Regional and local political case studies are important to have in their own right if one is to make valid generalisations on issues such as the nature of party in the early nineteenth century, the fluctuating relationship between whigs, liberals, and radicals, and the influence of social divisions in defining the nature and objectives of liberal politics. Popular politics in this period can only be fully comprehended by an integration of local and national approaches.

Newcastle, Bristol, and York were selected as the focus of
this study for comparative purposes. They shared several features in common. All three were provincial towns of the second rank which had been major pre-industrial centres. In addition to being important commercial, administrative, and social centres, each acted as a market place for a substantial agricultural hinterland, and as provincial capitals. Each was situated at a strategic position on a river or rivers - the Tyne, Avon, Ouse/Foss respectively - which faced problems in the nineteenth century of maintenance and/or accessibility. All three, moreover, had an established sense of civic pride and traditions, and a rich urban culture. They sustained a number of provincial newspapers, clubs, and societies, and a wide range of denominational pulpits which kept their populations in touch with pressing national issues. Cities such as Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds, Sheffield, and Bradford were exceptional in their economic take-off and rapid population increases in the early nineteenth century. Indeed, it is worth underlining how atypical such cities were; in 1801 only 30% of the population of England and Wales lived in towns of 2,500 inhabitants or more. The majority of the population were still rural dwellers and it is important not to draw a kind of 'cordon sanitaire' around towns. Newcastle should not be divorced from its links with Northumberland and Durham, York from the West Riding of Yorkshire, and Bristol from the rest of the Severn Valley. Unlike in the new industrial cities, at Newcastle, Bristol, and York there was more of a sense of social and economic continuity, although they too, of course, experienced substantial population increases:

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<th>Year</th>
<th>Newcastle</th>
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<tr>
<td>1801</td>
<td>33,000</td>
<td>61,000</td>
<td>17,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1811</td>
<td>33,000</td>
<td>71,000</td>
<td>19,000</td>
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<td>1821</td>
<td>42,000</td>
<td>85,000</td>
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<td>1831</td>
<td>54,000</td>
<td>104,000</td>
<td>26,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1841</td>
<td>70,000</td>
<td>124,000</td>
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This expansion in the population created its fair share of physical and social problems by the mid nineteenth century. Cholera hit both York and Newcastle hard in 1831/32, and detailed investigations in the 1840's, as a part of a national and local sanitary movement to
improve public health, revealed deplorable living conditions for the poor and a badly contaminated water supply. 

The nature of the regional economic structure within which each town operated naturally varied, as did contemporary perceptions of their overall economic performance in the early nineteenth century. Newcastle, at the heart of a thriving coal-mining region, became a major industrial centre, and the Tyne harbour became one of the world's greatest ports, the centre of bustling and profitable activity. William Cobbett on a visit to the town in 1832 described Newcastle, with its streets and shops, as "the London of the North". The Tyne appeared to be covered with ships, boats, and barges; there was "scarcely any square yard of water on the river without something floating on it every half hour". There was an intermingling of landed and industrial interests in the North-East which created a form of mixed economy and society, unlike that elsewhere. So close was the dependence of the local squirearchy on the profits of coal that Sir Henry Riddell commented memorably in 1729, "What signifies all your balls, ridotto's etc... unless navigation and the coal trade flourish."

Bristol, through its port and Western location had grown fat in the eighteenth century on the proceeds of slaves, sugar, and tobacco and was a centre for the trade of South Wales, the South-West counties of England, and parts of the Midlands as far North as Bridgenorth. Nevertheless, Bristol was conscious of a comparative economic decline in the early nineteenth century, especially relative to competing ports such as Liverpool. Some contemporary critics blamed the relative decline on restrictive dock duties, and a lack of enterprise and accountability on the part of the local corporation. The town was still able to exploit rich seams of business and pleasure, however, in the early nineteenth century, and was still capable of impressing outside observers. William Cobbett after a visit in 1830 described Bristol as:

"A good and solid and wealthy city : a people of plain and good manners; private virtue and public spirit indeed; no empty noise, no insolence, no flattery... A great commercial city in the midst of cornfields, meadows, and woods, and the ships coming into the centre of it, miles from anything like the sea, up a narrow river". (26)

At York, too, the perception was, of decline as it was, to a large extent, bypassed by the industrialisation which transformed much of Northern England. The city lost trade to Hull, and manufactures to Leeds.
York newspapers and the several writers of the 'histories' of the city found it notably difficult to record any contemporary function without suggesting that it was a poor affair compared with earlier generations. Yet the city continued to be a busy social capital, providing shops, services, and entertainment for the affluent citizens living in and beyond it. A contemporary observer in 1819 described the foreign commerce of the city as "totally annihilated" and added:

"Nothing that can be called a manufacture is now carried on in York; but here is a considerable trade carried on in gloves and drugs as well as in printing and bookselling, and some other branches of business... York is at this day, chiefly supported by its numerous and well-frequented fairs, the assizes for the county, the races, and the residence of many of the gentry". (28)

The town received a considerable impetus, however, from the large-scale railway developments of the late 1830's onwards. Bristol and York's experiences of the industrial revolution were not unique; characteristic of the early stages of rapid industrialisation was the failure of 'old towns' to undergo the developments of cities such as Manchester or Liverpool. Moreover, as one recent historian has put it, "a town like York was still a more representative example of urban England than a town like Liverpool". (29)

Newcastle, Bristol, and York were also all corporate towns with relatively large and difficult to manage freemen electorates. Elections and electioneering in larger freemen boroughs in the early nineteenth century had its own particular characteristics. Over and above the probable expense of an election contest, which was a considerable deterrent, aspiring new candidates faced the difficulty of establishing an election organization of committees and agents. The elite of towns, whether whig or tory, tended to be united in a belief that elections were disruptive. Thus the trading interests of Newcastle tended to regard an election contest as "a very serious evil, for it would suspend all business, create riot, and for the most part end in distress". And an introduction to a York poll book for 1818 complained that:

"A contested election... affords too much excitement to the worst passions of the human mind and leaves behind it, too many provocations to disunion and illwill; it offers too many temptations to idleness and intemperance of every kind, to those who require every check to lawless indulgence". (31)
Not surprisingly, freemen preferred contests for the financial gain and general excitement that would be involved, and when a combination of sitting M.P.s attempted a political compromise to avoid the expense of a contest, freemen usually sought a third candidate. In Newcastle in 1830, for example, the Tyne Mercury conjured up visions of freemen wandering about "beseeching and besieging" almost every gentleman they could think of to aid them in their efforts to deprive one of the sitting members of his seat, but in vain. Potential candidates realized the difficulty of breaking in from the outside and appreciated that such a large constituency would be expensive to fight (one of the candidates was said to have spent £10,000 at the subsequent uncontested election at Newcastle). The possible expense of transporting non-resident freemen from various parts of the county, who represented perhaps a third of the total electorate of Newcastle, Bristol, and York before 1832, further tended to discourage contests. There was no serious election contest in Newcastle between 1780 and 1832 largely because the town's elite were content to be represented by a conservative whig and a moderate tory who defended their business interests. Yet Newcastle was somewhat exceptional in thus frustrating the will of the freemen. Other large English freemen boroughs such as Norwich, Liverpool, Nottingham, Leicester, Lancaster, Coventry, were contested at virtually every election after 1790, whilst a spirit of political compromise at Bristol from 1790 came to an end in 1812. Most elections in larger freemen boroughs were contested, and in this respect such constituencies were in themselves exceptional. Fewer than a third of the 269 English and Welsh constituencies were contested in the 1830 General Election and even after 1832 a considerable proportion of seats in the House of Commons were to remain uncontested at elections. This is not primarily a psephological study of elections and voting behaviour, however, but rather an analysis of the context and organization of whig/liberal politics as it represented itself in Newcastle, Bristol, and York throughout the period 1812-1841. In the past it may have been the case in some constituencies that a brief period of election fever, and 'ad hoc' organization, punctuated years of comparative political inactivity. However, the point about the changing nature of political power and party organization in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was that it necessitated a network of agents and supporters, and informal and (increasingly) formal associations of politically active
individuals, which established committees, held meetings, petitioned, and used the press to mould public opinion. Organizations such as the Newcastle Fox Club, the York Whig Club, and the Bristol Liberal Association of the 1830's, whose activities are analysed in detail in this study, come into this category. Having said this much, however, the fact that there were ten General Elections within a period of less than thirty years inevitably helped to heighten political consciousness and contributed in many constituencies to the almost continuous expression of party and public opinion.

The choice of dates for beginning and ending the study is significant. Few studies span the 1832 Reform Act and compare and contrast political organization before and after this date. 1812 and 1841 were both General Election years, and in a sense it was a rags to riches to rags story for the whig party. At the former date Lord Grey was characteristically pessimistic:

"In the present state of the House of Commons we could not with advantage take up any public question... After so long a warfare in which I have drawn upon myself the implacable enmity of the court, I feel that I have no support from the people. Can I be accused under such circumstances of any desertion of public duty, if I begin at least to wish to withdraw myself from a service in which I meet with such a return?" (36)

In fact several factors were working to the whig party's advantage by this time, the Duke of York scandal of 1809, the Walcheren disaster of 1810, the successful campaign against the Orders-in-Council of 1811/12, and other wartime developments referred to above, all allowed the whigs to be increasingly associated with popular concerns. By 1841, after nearly eleven years in power the whigs had implemented a range of reforms which fulfilled many of the early nineteenth century hopes of the liberal middle classes, and yet still found that they had not progressed far enough or quickly enough.

The collective descriptive label the 'liberal middle classes' is a term which has been used by early nineteenth century historians in passing, but is not in widespread usage. It is a deliberately qualified label but nevertheless a serviceable and meaningful one. It recognizes, for example, that by no means all the middle classes were reformers. Many merchants, bankers, professional men and tradesmen in Newcastle, Bristol, and York were supporters of the tory government before 1830, and of a tory corporation in their immediate locality.
It is important to make the point that conservative forces remained very powerful in all three of the towns upon which this thesis focusses and 'public opinion' was not always liberal in its tone. Sir Robert Peel's speeches at the Merchant Taylor's Hall in 1835 and 1837 to the principal merchants, bankers and traders of London, and at Glasgow in 1836, were demonstrations that there was a middle class market for Peel's brand of conservatism. The label also sensibly recognizes that, given the wide variations in wealth, occupation, education, status, economic security, and political outlook, it is safer and more accurate to view the middle classes as a plural concept. 'Class' is a concept which may perform a range of discursive functions, of course, and a complicated metaphor which implies a condensation of a range of social tensions and identities. The middle classes are particularly problematic and recent work has distinguished different contexts in which a coherent middle class identity might be defined, and identified the fragility of that identity, particularly in the context of formal politics. Critics of the use that historians have made of 'class' as a category of historical analysis, argue that any putative middle class was too heterogeneous to exhibit "any reasonable level of unity and cohesion in attitude and behaviour". With such a diversity of occupations, wealth, and lifestyles they question how far a distinctive middle class had anything in common beyond lying in a very general sense between the aristocracy and the main body of manual wage earners. They also point to a lack of demarcation lines as to where one class begins and another ends. On the other hand, as Corfield has written recently:

"For a theoretical scrutiny of social and political behaviour, some aggregative analysis is inescapable for generalisation about millions of people who cannot be summed up painstakingly one by one". (43)

Moreover, whatever the 'reality' of class relations, consciousness of class differences was clearly an integral part of that reality. Many Britons employed the language of class in their efforts to understand, and collectively act upon circumstances in which they were placed, and it was in increasingly regular use from the 1760's onwards. The fact that contemporaries believed in the existence of something called the middle classes, which they too subjected to 'sociological' and academic study, must mean something. In so complex and subtle an area as social class one has to be content
with imperfect categories, or work within established frameworks established by theorists such as Marx, Weber, or Gramsci or variations therein, and this latter approach has been eschewed.

A great deal of nonsense was talked about the middle classes, in the early nineteenth century, however, as they were invested with any number of generalised virtuous qualities, especially by whig ministers during the reform debates of 1831/32. The following paean in praise of the middle classes from the Edinburgh Review of 1835 was typical:

"The middle, not the upper class, are the part of the nation which is entitled to command respect, and enabled to win esteem or challenge admiration. They read, they reflect, they reason, they think for themselves; they will neither let a pope, nor a prince, nor a minister, nor a newspaper, form their opinions for them; and they will neither from views of interest nor motives of fear, be made the dupe or tool of others. They are the nation – the people - in every rational or correct sense of the word. By them, through them, for them, the fabric of the government is reared, continued, designed". (46)

On the other hand, the general problem of achieving a successful system of representation did come to be identified with the specific objective of securing for the middle classes a degree of political influence proportionate to the influence which they had now acquired in the social and economic life of the country. During the reform crisis it is right to emphasize the importance that aristocratic whigs, ranging from a cautious Grey to a radical Lord Durham, attached to propitiating informed public opinion. There was some disagreement about the number of people responsible to exercise independent judgement, but few refuted the notion that there was a large body of the middle classes presently excluded from direct political participation whose voice it was both right and just to include within the parliamentary system.

There are problems of availability of source material when attempting to study the middle classes. Any convincing analysis of social structure must be based upon a detailed account of the distribution of income and wealth, but hitherto social historians have found that this is an area where detailed information in Britain is notoriously difficult both to find and, when found, to interpret. For example, income tax data and probate records do not match in their completeness the individual tax records, electoral assessments, marriage contracts, and probate inventories available for record linkage to French historians. There are similarly difficulties in
locating information concerning the political opinions of the middle classes. Unlike the aristocracy or landed gentry, it was rare that professional men, merchants, or other members of the middle classes preserved their private papers. Their views and preoccupations thus have to be interpreted indirectly through comments in the manuscript papers of larger landowners, through newspaper sources which record aspects of their public behaviour, or pamphlet material. This thesis is based upon a range of such material in Newcastle, Bristol, York and a number of other archives throughout the country.

Not surprisingly, all three towns with their extensive archival resources and libraries, and being the centres for universities, have generated several well-researched studies of various aspects of the nineteenth century and more distant past. Most directly relevant to some of the issues addressed in this study are, for Newcastle, the work of Milne on the North-East press (1978); Cook on 'the Last Days of the Unreformed Corporation (1961), Nossiter on the nature of post-reform electoral politics (1975), and in particular McCord, who addresses a wide range of social and political questions through local studies of the North-East (1970,1979 et.al.). Bristol has been especially fortunate in the quality of its historians; particularly useful and comprehensive is Bush's history of municipal developments in Bristol from 1820-1851 (1975). However, he admits to only providing an outline of local whiggism intended "merely as an impressionistic aid to an understanding of the political principles and policies likely to be held by members of the Bristol Corporation". Other works which contain helpful observations include a general history by Little (1954), a study by Williams of the elections of 1818 and 1820 (1968), Large on early nineteenth century radicalism (1981), Cannon on Bristol Chartism (1964), Alford on Bristol's economy (1976), Neve on the city's cultural institutions (1984), Marshall on the consequences for local politics of the emancipation of the slaves (1975), and Harrison on crowd events and riots (1989). For York there is a detailed study of social and economic developments in the first half of the nineteenth century by Armstrong (1974), whilst the works of Orange on York's scientific and cultural institutions (1973,1981) and Royle on religious non-conformity (1985) have also proved useful. The doyen of York politics in the nineteenth century is A.J. Peacock who produced a doctoral thesis on...
'York in the Age of Reform' in 1973, and a number of books and articles since then. Based upon an admirably thorough understanding and reading of York's newspapers, his work, however, provides an emphatically local view of events in the city, and he hardly ventured into archives beyond York. Whilst obviously drawing upon some of the insights and expertise of previous historians, this thesis has its own particular angle and set of priorities, and addresses a different set of questions. The aim is not to provide a full chronological political narrative of events at Newcastle, Bristol, and York, respectively between 1812 and 1841, but in each chapter to address key questions which have a national dimension, through the mechanism of focussed local studies.

The opening chapter outlines a growing provincial impatience at whig conservatism which became evident at successive Newcastle Fox Dinners in the 1810's, whilst the second chapter explains how provincial whig associations such as the York Whig Club could briefly succeed, but in general failed to achieve a national momentum and bring reformers together. The third chapter asks why some cities, such as Bristol, were comparatively backward in their endeavours for Parliamentary Reform, despite the attentions of reformers of impeccable credentials such as Samuel Romilly, and the urgings of local enthusiasts. It draws further attention to the several social divisions which handicapped demands for progressive change, and complicated the political division between whigs and radicals. Three middle chapters compare and contrast events and institutions at Newcastle, Bristol, and York. By the 1830's the press was as essential a part of the political process in England as the public meeting, the canvass, or the petition to parliament, and a chapter is devoted to charting the opinions and impact of liberal newspapers in specific localities. Chapter five broadens the notion of the 'political' beyond the confines of elections, parliament, the platform, and the press. The energies of individual members of the liberal middle classes were not exhausted by indulging in the hurly-burly of electoral and municipal politics. They often played a key role in the formation of provincial charitable, commercial, cultural, educational, or religious organizations, and such activities could contain a politically sensitive sub-text. In 1835 Joseph Parkes, the liberal election agent, wrote of "the driving currents rushing under the apparently calm surface of society". In his view liberal opinions were gaining not losing in English towns. This must be the case he explained "with such a vast increase in locomotion and such a rapidly
progressing diffusion of knowledge" Parkes' prognosis proved to be characteristically optimistic, but it was indicative of the way that the acquisition and transmission of knowledge was not perceived as coming value-free. A subsequent chapter explores the responses in Newcastle, Bristol, and York to the reform crisis of 1830-32. The fate of Political Unions and reform associations in different localities and circumstances enables a comparison to be drawn between the tactics of the liberal middle classes in different constituencies, and their relationship with more radical groups and less socially elevated reformers. In the late 1830's the liberal middle classes were to face similar dilemmas in their approach to dealings with the Chartists. Should the policy be one of icy distaste, reluctant disapproval, inactive approval, or cooperation? As T.A.Devyr made clear in a widely distributed appeal to the middle classes, many of the Chartists would clearly have preferred the sympathetic members of the middle classes who shared some of their disabilities to support them and help pressurize parliament into widening the franchise. However, behind the rational arguments about natural rights and natural justice lay the mass meeting, violent rhetoric, and the threat of an armed rising. The conflicting pressures upon one individual who was in broad sympathy with Chartist aspirations, and yet was in a responsible position of authority as Mayor in 1839, charged with the maintenance of law and order, are explored in the chapter on 'John Fife and Newcastle politics in the 1830's.' The last two chapters look respectively at the development of party organization in the constituencies and the continuing influence of freemen in corporate boroughs in the 1830's. The chapter focusing upon Bristol explores how well Whigs and Liberals responded to the new organizational requirements of the 1830's. It analyzes the London based efforts of Parkes, Ellice, and Lord Durham to promote activity and organization in the constituencies, and then details the activities of the Bristol Liberal Association as a case study in constituency organization. The chapter devoted to York politics after 1832 asks how far the particular concerns of freemen voters may have diverted the course of politics in some constituencies from its normal channels in the 1830's. The Times could declare in June 1833 that "the most active spring of election bribery and villainy anywhere is known to be the corporate system". To an extent this was the case even after the reforms of 1832 and 1835 when freemen shared the possession of the franchise with registered £10 household voters.
The 1832 Reform Act had important implications for the way that politics would be conducted in the future. It ushered in a new kind of registration politics, and new policy challenges, to which the Whig government by and large failed to rise.

The mainstream view of historians on the political events of the 1830's largely follows that of the veteran Whig Sir Robert Adair. In his eyes the Whigs had always been a party of "improvement Conservatism", but he assured Lord John Russell in May 1839, "Now Peel & the Tories of his class are gradually occupying the ground we abandon to them." The analysis is, in one sense, beyond dispute. In the late 1830's rank and file liberals required a new stimulus to loyalty and activity, and the Whig response was leaden-footed and lacking in invention, whilst the attractions of Sir Robert Peel's 'Tamworth Conservatism' were obvious to middle of the road voters, even if much of the Tory party had hardly begun to take on board the new agenda. Yet the cumulative effect of the final three chapters is to suggest that there are factors in the landslide Conservative election victory of 1841 that may have been underestimated; the deep divisions within the Whig/Liberal cause did a great deal, in modern terminology, to split and fracture the leftist vote, the continuing influence of traditional electoral practices tended to favour Tory candidates, and the indifference of the Whig leadership to party management and organization, and to cultivating the goodwill of those on whom they depended for support cost the party several seats.

This chapter opened with an account of a political dinner, which is appropriate since in several respects political dinners encapsulate many of the issues and problems which the following study addresses. They provide a valuable means of access into the provincial political scene and provincial society as well as providing insights on national developments. Local and often national newspapers regarded political dinners as important events, and the speeches that were made on these occasions were duly reported at some length. By devoting so many column inches to political dinners the press further elevated their importance as a mode of political discourse. They were both a result of the increased political partisanship of the early nineteenth century, and helped to contribute to continued division. This was a point made by William IV in a letter written by his private secretary to Lord Melbourne in November 1834:
"His Majesty has not ceased to deprecate the practice, which has more especially obtained lately, of giving grand dinners, which are a sort of political assembly at which topics are introduced, which necessarily lead to crimination and recrimination when parties are split as at present". (58)

Political dinners which took place at Newcastle, Bristol, and York usefully help to delineate both the ebb and flow of whig and liberal fortunes in the pre-reform period from about 1812 to 1830, and the disintegration of liberal unity in the post-reform years down to 1841. At Newcastle, in addition to the Fox dinners, there was a set-piece dinner to honour Lord Durham in November 1834, when the front of the Assembly Rooms was lit up with the words 'Durham and Reform', and radical feasts to honour Daniel O'Connell and James Aytoun in 1835 and 1836 respectively, all of which crystallized whig and liberal uncertainties. At Bristol the fiasco of a ceremonial open-air dinner on Brandon Hill in August 1832 that was intended to celebrate the passing of the Reform Act, indicated graphically the fundamental social and political divisions between reformers which existed in the city, just as the dinner to honour Lord John Russell in November 1835, and the annual gatherings of the Bristol Liberal Association in 1836 and 1837 represented Liberal high-points. At York, the success of the York Whig Club dinners in the early 1820's, with the presence of star speakers such as J.G.Lambton, contrasted with the disunity of the York Liberal Association in the late 1830's. It was a similar story elsewhere. There were a series of whig dinners in Scotland from 1821 onwards, for example, which Francis Jeffrey described in glowing terms:

"They were by far the most effective of all the public movements in Scotland on the popular side at that time... They gathered together the aristocracy in station and in character of the Scotch Whig party; but derived still greater weight from the open accession of citizens who for many years had been taught to shrink from political interference on this side, as hurtful to their business". (59)

Such dinners were public rather than private occasions but were not public in the sense of being open. They were gathering points for a male elite which the rest of the town, meaning those tradesmen and artisans who were not 'gentlemen', its working classes and women could watch. In other words the 'public' tended to have the limited meaning of propertied men. The definition of the 'liberal middle classes' in this study is similarly exclusive in its scope. There
were a number of ways in which guests tended to be limited to a particular strata and section of society. Dinners usually started at about five o'clock, which excluded those who did not belong to a leisured elite or who did not have control over their employment - most people would still have been at work. This is not an unimportant point; individuals needed to have sufficient time to become involved in politics. In fact, even for most propertied men, the timing of the dinners tended to be inconvenient; as the editor of the *Tyne Mercury* noted in August 1833 in a piece entitled 'A Word or Two on Public Dinners in Newcastle'. The great majority of the people who attended were "of the middle class of life" who were used to eating at one or two o'clock, but because of the presence of half a dozen eminent gentlemen and individuals of distinction, who usually dined later, "the public dinner must be ready at the same hour for their convenience", although the consequence was that most people had no appetite for their dinner then at all. The usual cost of a ticket of 15/- to a guinea would also have been beyond most individuals means, and could be a further way for moderate reformers to impose a social and political exclusion zone. Yet although the public who attended dinners was often limited, political dinners were consciously events that were in the public domain and required a great deal of planning. It was counter-productive to hold a dinner that would be open to ridicule from newspapers of opposing political principles. An organizer's aim was for guests at a dinner to be described as "numerous and respectable", a phrase which became a convention of newspaper reportage, and which claims always need to be viewed with healthy scepticism.

Political dinners thus performed several functions. They offered a platform and an opportunity to espouse a particular message. Alternative opportunities for making speeches were less comfortable - on the hustings candidates were likely to be assailed with a barrage of verbal opposition and similarly at public meetings in a pre-microphone age, few people would hear what was said beyond the first few rows. They were a means of expressing and confirming political unity and strength, or celebrating a particular event or an individual's achievements. And perhaps above all they acted as a meeting place. At a dinner to honour his brother F.H.P. Berkeley in Bristol in January 1839, Lord Segrave remarked as part of a more general justification of political dinners that:
"One of the most important acts an assembly of this kind has is the communication between representative and constituent; the comparison of the views they may entertain on points of public or local business; in short that communication and good understanding which ought and may be cultivated with advantage to both, and without sinking the member into the character of a mere delegate." (63)

The following chapters aim to explore in greater depth the terrain where national and local politics and politicians met.
FOOTNOTES


3. The phrase was first coined by Professor J. H. Plumb in an article in the *New Statesman* 16 Feb. 1973 pp. 234-35.


12. *The Works and Correspondence of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke* (1852) III pp. 232-237; P. Underdown "Edmund Burke, the commissary
of his Bristol constituents 1774" English Historical Review LXXIII (1958) pp.252-269.


17. For a local study which analyses the transition period, and perceives a widening regional consciousness cf. J.Money, Experience and Identity, Birmingham and the West Midlands 1760-1800 (Manchester, 1977).


Values and Working Class Culture in Nineteenth Century Sheffield' (University of Sheffield, Ph.D., 1976); D. Fraser (ed.) A History of Modern Leeds (Manchester, 1980); D. Fraser, Urban Politics in Victorian England (1973), and references below: note 41.


42. Professor McCord has been a particularly staunch critic of historians slackness in their use of class terminology. The quotation is from his book *North East England* (1979) p.17. Articles by him which develop this theme include "Adding a Touch of class", *History LXX* (1985) and "Some Difficulties of Parliamentary Reform", *Historical Journal* (1967). Also see G.Kitson Clark, *The Critical Historian* pp.153-155; T.Nossiter, "The Middle Class and Nineteenth Century Politics" in J.Garrard et.al. (ed.) *The Middle Class in Politics* (Farnborough, 1978) pp.77-84.


47. Contemporary studies demonstrated this influence. eg. P. Colquhoun, *Treatises on the Wealth and Resources of the British Empire* (1814) cited evidence that the aggregate of income of the middle classes who earned £60-3,000 per annum exceeded that of the upper in proportion of 29:1 - over £240 million compared with £8.7 million.

48. These issues are discussed further, with references, in chapter 6.


50. It is not the intention to footnote the following books and articles. They are referred to in the text and bibliography.


53. An early example of such a comparative approach was provided by A. Briggs, "The Background to the Parliamentary Reform Movement in Three English Cities (Birmingham, Leeds, and Manchester)" (Cambridge) *Historical Journal* V (1952) pp.293-317.


55. *The Times* 25 June 1833.

56. P.R.O. 30/22/3C Sir Robert Adair to Lord John Russell 5 May 1839.

57. For the traditional interpretation of the decline of the whigs in the 1830's cf. N. Gash, *Reaction and Reconstruction in English politics 1832-52* (Oxford, 1965); D. Southgate, *The Passing of*

58. Quoted in H.Jephson, The Platform (1892) II p.168. This was written in the wake of a notorious clash of opinions between Lord Durham and Lord Chancellor Brougham at a dinner to honour Lord Grey in Edinburgh. Each had also made a speechifying tour of Scotland before this dinner.


60. For a recent study which emphasizes the role of women in the making of the English middle classes in the early nineteenth century cf. L.Davidoff and C.Hall, Family Fortunes : Men and women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850 (1986).


THE WHIGS AND THE NEWCASTLE FOX DINNERS 1812-1820

I hope that public meetings of this kind have a higher and better use than even the promotion of social intercourse. Though we may be anxious to honour the memory of so great a statesman, yet there is a higher use than that of which it is capable - that of encouraging our countrymen to the observation of those principles which are best calculated to secure and promote the interests of their country.

(Lord Grey, quoted in the Tyne Mercury, 27 September 1814).

The importance of Fox Clubs and similar associations throughout the country in the 1810's and early 1820's was recognized by Austin Mitchell, in his study of the whigs in opposition between 1815 and 1830, and the most recent comprehensive analysis of the structure of early nineteenth century politics has confirmed that "the Fox and Pitt Clubs could do with an historian". Mitchell noted that the Fox dinners could provide 'useful platforms and means of propaganda' but described the clubs and their functions as 'essentially social'.

Generally, the importance of Fox Clubs did indeed lie in bringing together whigs in and out of parliament, but the Newcastle Fox Dinners, which took place in 1812, 1813, 1814, 1817 and 1818 were exceptional in having a wider political significance. They did not secure the largest attendance by any means - about a hundred men usually sat down to eat at the Queen's Head Tavern - but the Newcastle dinners tended to receive the most national attention and comment. The reason for this was that, when he attended, Lord Grey, the whig leader, usually made a major speech - and by 1817 John Lambton, the future Lord Durham, was also becoming a politician of national stature. Following the elevation of Grey to the House of Lords, upon the death of his father in November 1807, the House of Commons was closed to him and he had few opportunities for public speaking. When he spoke in the Lords, the subject matter tended to be limited to the particular issue under discussion. The Newcastle speeches, on the other hand, rather like the addresses of leaders at modern party conferences, contained a broad sweep of the current issues and give a good idea of Grey's prevailing concerns and preoccupations. Equally interesting is the reaction to what Grey said, both locally and nationally. The years 1812-20 were largely barren and unsatisfactory ones, both for the whigs generally, who were out of power and divided on many issues, and for Lord Grey personally who was usually pessimistic as to future political prospects. Nevertheless
it was also an important and formative time for the whigs; there arose in the post-war period a feeling that government power had become uncontrolled, and the political events and economic hardship of these years were critical in persuading many, though not all, whigs that the old system had lost the confidence of the country, and that some form of parliamentary reform was the only answer.

The central Fox Club in London seems to have been founded in 1790 as a kind of appendage to the Whig Club, but it came to assume a greater importance after the collapse of the Whig Club towards the end of 1811. Apart from Newcastle and London, there were also Fox Clubs at Norfolk, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Suffolk, Bristol and elsewhere. The clubs were established partly in order to ensure the purity of Charles James Fox's posthumous reputation and partly to counter the popular Pitt Clubs which were active in most parts of the country. In the North-East, for example, a rival Newcastle and Northumberland Pitt Club celebrated the anniversary of the birthday of William Pitt every 28 May throughout the 1810's and 1820's. These were quite well attended and the local Tory newspaper, the Newcastle Courant, dutifully gave full coverage to the proceedings each year. But the speakers were some way from matching the political weight of their counterparts at the Fox dinners and what was said at the Pitt dinners never caused any ripples outside Newcastle and Northumberland - and rarely there. The guests at the Fox and Pitt dinners in Newcastle tended to fall, broadly speaking, into the opposite political camps of 'whig' and 'tory', although it would be a mistake to make too clearcut a distinction. For example, an entry in the diary of James Losh, a staunch, albeit moderate, whig, shows that the Newcastle Pitt Club contained whigs:

"This being Mr. Pitt's birthday, Mr. Mosman, who is an old whig, asked those persons whom he considered of the same opinions to dine with him, there being a Pitt dinner, as is called, at the Rooms. We had a cheerful, convivial day." (5)

Pitt had regarded himself as a whig, not a tory, and 'moderate reformers claimed the early Pitt as well as Fox, for their political ancestry'. It was an indication of the confusion of political labels that Henry Brougham could complain in February 1814 that "we have lived to see the time when Foxite means Pittite or something very near it". He wrote to Lord Grey complaining of "the mismanagement of the party" which had led to the reformist 'Mountain' group of whig M.P.s being excluded from the invitation list for a London Fox dinner:
"it is rather good to see the real and best Foxites so treated; us who stand up for Fox against Pitt..." (6)

The 'Mountain' M.P.s felt that they had a claim to be seen as Fox's true heirs. In so far as Fox's posthumous reputation is concerned, one does not turn to the Fox dinners if one wants to receive objective insights into his political career - he was universally eulogized in the speeches each year, and the liberal newspapers in Newcastle, the whig Newcastle Chronicle, and the whig-radical Tyne Mercury, were equally uncritical. Before the 1813 dinner, for example, the Tyne Mercury published, in full, a speech Fox had addressed to his constituents in 1780 in Westminster Hall, attacking deformities in the representative system and extravagant government expenditure. The general message was that all Fox had said was even more relevant today and the reason that the country was in such a mess was because politicians had not followed Fox's prescriptions. This theme was constantly reiterated by speakers at the Newcastle dinners. A striking feature of most whig politicians in the 1810's and 1820's was their loyalty to the principles and memory of Fox. A generation of whigs were retrospective - anxious about stepping forward without glancing over the shoulder and asking themselves what Fox would have done in a particular situation. Lord Holland was particularly vehement in his defence of his uncle's career after his death, although the intense concern of Holland House for Fox's reputation sometimes degenerated into pure farce. There was a furious debate in 1820 as to what should be the epitaph on his tombstone, and a competition to decide who should write it.

Lord Grey did not attend the 1812 dinner in Newcastle, held on 24 January to celebrate the anniversary of Fox's birthday, but this did not prevent the occasion generating a great deal of local excitement and national comment. The Newcastle Chronicle reported that:

"This meeting has formed almost the only topic of conversation in this town for the last week; and from the regret which members have expressed at their having failed to attend it, it may confidently be expected that a very considerable addition will be made to the numbers of the next meeting. " (10)

It also noted that the Sun and other ministerial newspapers had attacked the meeting, demanding why it should take place now for the first time, 'and attributing party motives, of no very amiable nature, to all those who were in any way connected with it.' In future years, too, ministerial papers such as the Courier and the Sun
were to use the dinners and the speeches made at them as ammunition for their attacks upon the whigs - but the very fact that they reported the dinners showed that they were too important to be ignored. Speeches were made at the 1812 dinner by Sir Ralph Milbanke, the chairman, Sir Charles Monck, George Silvertop, Charles Bigge, and Dr. John Fenwick, all prominent men in the region.

Whilst the emphasis of this account will be chiefly concerned with the political significance of the Newcastle dinners, it is important to recognize that they were highly convivial social events as well. They represented an opportunity for the whigs of Northumberland, Durham and Newcastle to come together, and each year they were always six stewards, two from each area. Entry was in theory open to anyone, but in practice the ticket price of one guinea meant that the guests were 'all gentlemen and upper tradesmen and merchants'.

It was a colourful occasion - the walls were festooned with variegated lamps whilst 'the centre of the tables was decorated with all that art or fancy could suggest, with temples and columns of ingenious workmanship'. Bands played during the course of the meal and the food and wine were always reported to be excellent. Usually the dinners began at five o'clock and the company did not break up until after midnight. The Newcastle Courant poked gentle fun at the feasting aspect of the proceedings, remarking in 1817, for example, that:

"The wines were excellent and the evening passed away (maugre the suspension of the habeas corpus act, and the miserable situation of the country) with great freedom, hilarity and satisfaction." (14)

Over forty toasts were usually drunk in the course of the evening so one can well imagine that the company broke up highly delighted with the evening's entertainment! Many of the toasts were self-congratulatory or lauded the efforts of leading whigs in parliament, others help to give an impression of whig principles and priorities. Amongst the toasts regularly drunk were: 'The Constitution as established in 1688', 'The House of Hanover and may they never forget the principles which seated them on the throne', 'The Cause of Ireland, and may the efforts of the Friends of Religious Liberty be crowned with success', 'The Rights of the People of which Mr. Fox was ever the zealous defender', 'The Liberty of the Press', 'The Cause for which Hampden bled in the field and Sidney died on the Scaffold', 'The Rose, the Thistle and the Shamrock' and 'The Cause of civil and religious liberty all over the world'. Many of these toasts were characteristically
backward looking. At the 1813 Fox dinner, Sir John Swinburne, a Northumberland country gentleman, rose to propose the following toast:

"There was an old lady to whom I was very much attached in my youth. Having not heard of her, however, for a considerable time, there is reason to apprehend that she has departed this life, and as we have been drinking memories, I beg leave to propose: 'The Memory of Parliamentary Reform, and may there be a speedy Resurrection'." (16)

In the course of the next decade, Parliamentary Reform was indeed to be resurrected, and at subsequent dinners the question would be very much in the forefront of the guests' minds.

The 1813 dinner was postponed from January until 23 September, the anniversary of Fox's first election for Westminster in 1780, to enable the leading whig politicians of the North-East to attend, necessarily absent because Parliament was in session. Unfortunately, Lord Grey was still unable to attend because of illness in his family - which caused general disappointment. It had been intended that he should act as chairman, but, because scarlet fever had broken out at Howick, he was forced to send his apologies. Since Grey had fifteen children, illness amongst them was fairly common and sometimes provided him with an opportunity to excuse himself from unwanted engagements, but on this occasion he seemed genuinely sorry to have been unable to attend. (It was the fact that Grey was due to take the chair at Newcastle, which the radical H.G.Bennet cynically claimed kept him from attending the dinner - "as Lord Grey and the principles of Mr. Fox have long ago parted company"! (18)

In any case the dinner passed off successfully with Sir Charles Monck, M.P. for Northumberland, as acting chairman.

"The company, consisting of many of the principal characters of the town and neighbourhood distinguished for wealth or consequence in society, was numerous beyond precedent, though at least as many more were absent who would have attended, had there been a prospect that the room could have contained them." (19)

It was the first time that many of the guests would have seen John Lambton, who had been elected as a Member of Parliament for the county of Durham only three days earlier. Lambton's health was drunk with enthusiasm and his response to the toast was modest in its tone and eloquent in its praise of the political principles of Fox. James Losh, who attended this and all the subsequent Fox dinners, shrewdly observed that:
"Mr. Lambton has a fine voice, expressed himself with ease and vigour and his manners are graceful. It seems to me that if his health continue good and he can conquer his Aristocratic habits, he will become a man of consequence in the State. (20)

The two question marks which Losh placed against Lambton were to be features which contributed to making Lambton's political career less successful than he himself and other contemporary observers might have expected.

James Losh himself was more than merely a perceptive onlooker, being a man of great importance on Tyneside in his own right. Solicitor, businessman and industrialist, promoter of educational projects, leading Unitarian and political organizer, Losh was consulted by Lord Grey as to political opinion on Tyneside in 1819 and 1831, and corresponded regularly with Henry Brougham in the 1820's and 30's. When Major Cartwright came to Newcastle on his tour of Northern England in 1815, he visited Losh who he described as 'a true gentleman of the democratic school.' After 1820, he was a consistent advocate in the cause of religious and civil liberty - Losh spoke, for example, on behalf of Catholic Emancipation, Free Trade, Anti-Slavery and similar causes. In fact, between 1820 and 1832 there were few meetings for promoting liberal ideas at which Losh did not speak. His professional career was impeded by the fact that he was a dissenter, but following the repeal of the Test and Corporations Act he was invested in 1832 as Recorder of Newcastle, although he died only a year later. 21

At the 1814 Newcastle Fox dinner held on 19 September, there was, according to the Tyne Mercury, 'more political information communicated than it has ever yet fallen our lot to record upon any similar occasion.' 22 Lord Grey attended this and subsequent dinners. His speech was preceded by a fulsome introduction from Lambton, who was to become his son-in-law only a year later. He declared that Grey merited the gratitude of every true friend of the nation because he had, 'disdained to hold the reins of government, when fettered by an unconstitutional pledge'. The reference was to overtures which the Prince Regent had made to Grey to form a ministry in 1812 and Grey's unwillingness to compromise on catholic emancipation. The whig leader touched upon this in his speech, but, inevitably, most of what he had to say was given over to foreign policy - the recently ended war with France and the peace negotiations which were in train. Two points emerge quite distinctly:
Grey's continued ambivalence as to whether the war should have been conducted at all, and his concern for national independence and self-determination, which was to be a distinctive characteristic of whig policy in the post-war years. He expressed joy and exultation at the conclusion of a war in which England had escaped from greater danger than any which had threatened it in any former period of history - 'the tyrant was hurled from his throne... by the feelings of the whole civilized world, actuated by the principle of self preservation and the laws of nature'. But despite the danger that Grey admitted England had faced, and despite his celebration of the victory, he had rarely spoken publicly in favour of the war, (although in April 1811 he had praised the Duke of Wellington for the deliverance of Portugal and acknowledged errors of judgement on his own part in the past). Sir James Mackintosh had attempted unsuccessfully to extract Grey's attitude to the war in a series of letters written in the autumn of 1813. Mackintosh had tried to convince Grey that:

"...the whig party is at liberty, if not bound in consistency with all the former maxims and counsels to support the war in present circumstances for just, reasonable and well-defined objects.

But whilst Grey was prepared to admit that his views on the war had changed, and that new circumstances such as the failure of France in Russia and the British successes in Spain, had altered the situation, he could not be persuaded to lead the whigs at the beginning of the next parliamentary session. By September 1814 Grey's main apprehensions were with regard to the settlement of Europe shortly to be transacted at the Congress of Vienna. He was opposed to the 'principle of partition' and worried for the fate of Genoa, Saxony, Norway and Poland, 'if new schemes are now in contemplation, whereby the greater powers are to be secured at the expense of the weaker'. He concluded his remarks on the subject by calling for 'the hottest Opposition that has been made for years'. Later in his speech Grey referred to the slave trade and joined with Lambton in attacking Lord Castlereagh for signing an agreement in Paris which would allow the trade to continue for a further five years. Characteristically, Grey ended with a call for all those present to defend the sacred constitution which, in his view, had not escaped the war without being severely wounded. Large and expensive establishments and standing armies were incompatible with the principles of the constitution and ought to be reduced within the lowest possible limits that the safety of the country would allow - this was a
long-standing subject of whig attention. The other main speakers at the dinner, Sir Charles Monck, Sir Matthew White Ridley (MP for Newcastle) and Dr. Fenwick reiterated Grey's criticisms and further attacked the government for continuing the war in America.

On Grey's own testimony, the reports of his speeches in the Tyne Mercury are reasonably reliable accounts of what he said. W.A. Mitchell, the paper's editor, sought Grey's backing in 1817, in a dispute with the Newcastle Courant as to the accuracy of his report of Grey's Fox dinner speech of that year, and requested permission to affix Grey's name to a declaration admitting the report's general accuracy. Perhaps wisely the whig leader refused the request and decided not to get involved in a public slanging match between rival newspapers.

It has been a rule with me throughout my public life, never to make myself in any way responsible for the reports of my speeches in the public newspapers. If he should once answer an appeal such as Mitchell's, Grey argued, he would be deluged with similar requests. But he did add for the benefit of Mitchell's personal satisfaction that the report, whilst not exempt from inevitable inaccuracies, appeared to have been made with more than usual care and attention. There was clearly sense in Grey's argument, but in another respect he was passing up an opportunity, and his feigned lack of concern as to what was written about him was somewhat disingenuous since Lord Holland, Brougham and Lambton were busy at various times trying to secure a better press for the party. Grey had written to Sir Robert Wilson in 1815 that the whigs had always been, and probably always would be, extremely ill-served by the press. He was gloomy about this as he was gloomy about so many things:

The cause of the blame of this it is in vain to explore, as I am convinced the evil is beyond the reach of any remedy that I can apply. (27)

One remedy would have been to descend occasionally from the lofty heights of aristocratic disdain. Before shorthand came into use, the misrepresentation of speeches was a problem for politicians; for example, Dr. Fenwick, the leading whig in Durham City, wrote to Grey in January 1821 pointing out that journalists from the Newcastle and Durham Chronicles disagreed as to what Grey had said at a Northumberland County Meeting, both with respect to Parliamentary Reform and the Durham clergy. Fenwick suggested publishing the
speech so as to correct the principal inaccuracies and supply the
omissions, but it does not seem as if Grey followed the advice.28
The liberal press did a great service to the whigs in giving ex-
tensive coverage to the Newcastle Fox dinners; the reports in the
*Tyne Mercury* and *Newcastle Chronicle* often took up a whole page,
and sometimes more, and they were paraphrased nationally. Grey,
therefore, might have done more to maintain support amongst those
who were inclined towards the whigs. By the mid 1820's the *Tyne
Mercury* had turned against Grey and made strong criticisms of him
during the 1826 Northumberland County election campaign, when it
supported T.W.Beaumont in preference to Grey's son, Lord Howick.29

It is unclear why there were no Fox anniversary dinners in 1815
or 1816. It is possible that, with the widespread economic dis-
tress on the Tyne in these years, it was deemed inappropriate to
hold a public dinner where there would be a conspicuous consumption
of food and drink. The distress was intensified by a seamen's
strike in the summer of 1815 which temporarily put a stop to trade
on the river. Soup kitchens were opened in 1816 and, according to
the *Newcastle Chronicle*, 11,500 quarts of soup were being supplied
daily in November of that year. It is also possible that Newcastle
whigs considered that opposition from parliamentary whigs (includ-
ing their own member of parliament) to the Corn Law of 1815 had been
insufficiently strenuous, and that they therefore did not want to
organize a Fox dinner. Certainly there was a strong feeling in the
town against the Corn Law, as exemplified by the fact that in 1815
25,500 people signed a petition against the measure. But these
suggestions have to remain surmise.30

Thus the next time that North-East whigs came together at a
Fox dinner was 19 September 1817, and again it was an important
gathering. The *Newcastle Chronicle* reported that:

> The speech delivered by Earl Grey, and the other pro-
ceedings at the Fox Dinner... have produced a strong
sensation throughout the country, and have been copied
into nearly all the papers of the Kingdom. As might be
expected, the Ministerial Journals have attacked the
parties with all their virulence. His Lordship and Mr.
Lambton are particularly selected by them as the objects
of their obloquy. (31)

Given the strong language of Lambton's speech, it is hardly
surprising that it attracted critical attention. He strongly
attacked the 'system' which the government had instituted:
It is hateful, as abhorrent to our feelings, as any tyranny of continental despotism ever invented. Its object is military despotism; its means are bribery, subornation, corruption and perjury.

Grey's speech ranged over foreign policy, the economy, the suspension of Habeas Corpus, criticism of the government's system of spies and informers, and Parliamentary reform. On foreign policy Grey bemoaned the results of the Congress of Vienna and castigated the acts of fraud, perfidy and violence which transferred whole countries and their people from one sovereign to another without regard to humanity, or to right and justice. With regard to public expenditure and the national debt, which had now reached forty four million pounds, Grey pressed for real economies and retrenchment very different from those 'frivolous and delusive measures which have been adopted rather with a view of dividing the public attention, and silencing their just complaints, than with any intention of applying any real remedy to the disease'. He warned that the government should never be allowed to reimpose the property tax. It was this aspect of Grey's speech which attracted most criticism from the Tory press in London and, in deed, modern research has demonstrated that Grey's criticism was largely unfair. Lord Liverpool's administration had cut government expenditure just about as far as was possible; there was a necessary standing army to maintain, and legitimate pensions to be paid. When a combination of whigs and independent country gentlemen had rejected the property tax in 1816, the government's freedom of action had been further restricted. Grey was probably most eloquent and effective in his criticism of the suspension of Habeas Corpus, which had previously only happened in times of war or open rebellion at home, and in his attacks on the invidious system of government spies and informers. They were subjects to which Grey had devoted three long speeches in the House of Lords earlier in the year and which he regarded as major attacks on England's free constitution. Lambton wrote to Sir Robert Wilson in high spirits following the dinner, describing Grey's hour long speech as excellent:

"You will have seen in the Times an account of our dinner at Newcastle. I hope it will have done some good. If it is attacked you must incite Perry to defend it with spirit, its principal object was to draw the public attention to the course ministers are pursuing with regard to the supposed Treason, and the motives that actuate them"
in urging economy - I trust it has done so... I was greatly pleased at so numerous a meeting, as it proved me right, contrary to the predictions of Ridley and Monck, who were most slack on the subject". (33)

It was Grey's words on parliamentary reform that the guests at Newcastle were awaiting most eagerly. Over 600 petitions for reform came to parliament in 1817 which demonstrated that feelings in certain parts of the country were running strongly in favour. 34 But Grey was hedging his bets on the question. In view of the alliance with the Grenvilles (which was to end a few months later) and the well-known opposition to reform of men of standing in the party such as Earl Fitzwilliam, he had decided in January 1817 against making reform the subject of party discussion, preferring to leave it to individual initiatives. He wrote to Lord Holland, his friend and political ally, that agreement on the question of parliamentary reform was hopeless. It should be left as it hitherto had been for individuals to act upon according to their respective opinions. Grey admitted that in the future this stance might have to be modified or abandoned but for the moment, the question of parliamentary reform should be set aside. 35 At Newcastle Grey noted that:

To the principles which I professed in early life I still adhere... I am still a reformer, but with some modification of my former opinions; with more fear of the effect of sudden and inconsiderate changes, with a most complete conviction that to be successful, reform must be gradual, and must be carefully limited. (36)

He went on to speak warmly against those such as Hunt, Cobbett and Burdett who advocated universal suffrage and annual parliaments. Newcastle reformers, such as Losh, were starting to worry about Grey's real commitment to parliamentary reform - Losh described him as speaking 'in a way if not to remove all doubt as to his sincerity and consistency, at least to lessen the suspicions which have been entertained against him very considerably'. 37 Worries had even existed three years earlier, on the same subject, when Losh could refer to Grey as speaking with 'apparent frankness' and could not help observing 'that Lord Grey never in direct terms mentioned Parliamentary Reform, though both Mr. Lambton and Dr. Fenwick gave him fair opportunities of doing so.' 38 Fenwick voiced his disappointment in a letter to the veteran campaigner for Parliamentary Reform, the Reverend Christopher Wyvill, following the 1814 dinner: '...I fear the change which he in the House of Lords
acknowledged to have taken place in his sentiments on this sub-
ject, amounts to total abandonment of the great question.' He
greatly regretted the 'revolution in the principles' of a man whose
'strict sense of honour' and 'gracious and elevated feelings' he so
admired. 39 Grey was to prove hardly more forthcoming in 1817 and
the opinion of the leading Newcastle whigs was to harden with re-
gard to parliamentary reform in the next two or three years.
Increasingly, vague declarations from Grey would prove insuffi-
cient to satisfy them.

In June 1817, Grey had announced in the House of Lords that
he felt himself declining in years and strength and that his attempt
to overturn the government's suspension of Habeas Corpus might be
the last duty he would perform for his country. 40 The statement
was probably intended as a public retirement and his words at the
Newcastle Fox dinner tend to confirm this: 'My life is drawing to
a close; the period of active exertion is over; for that you must
look to others'. 41 It sums up the weakness of the whig opposi-
tion in these years that even an attempt by their leader to retire
was a half-hearted failure.

In his biography of Lord Grey, G.M. Trevelyan argued that Grey
did not particularly enjoy 'the decorous eloquence of Fox dinners'
and quoted a letter from Grey to his wife written in December 1818:
'I cannot tell you how this Fox dinner annoys me, and the idea of
being set up there as a sort of show, to bring people to hear me
speak'. 42 But Grey's annoyance was perhaps due less to a distaste
for public speaking than to two other factors. In the first place
he was very eager to get home as subsequent letters to Lady Grey
make clear. He was staying with Lambton at Chester-le-Street and
had been reluctant to leave his wife who was expecting a child at
the end of January or early February. 43 And the second element in
his irritation was that he probably realised that what he had to
say in his speech with regard to parliamentary reform, would be
unsatisfactory to many of the guests, and to the wider audience of
observers who would read the speech in the local and national news-
papers.

The 1818 dinner was postponed from September until 31 December,
partly because the organizational arrangements had not been finally
settled by the stewards at the earlier date but mainly because the
death of the Queen was expected at any moment and it was thought
undecorous and disrespectful to hold the meeting in such circumstanc.
Grey's speech was once more wide-ranging and as usual Fox's exemplary principles were cited regularly in support of his arguments. His comments on foreign policy were strongly non-interventionist in tone; he hoped that England would never be brought to concur in engagements as a result of secret treaties, or be persuaded to tolerate a system of perpetual interference in the affairs of other countries. Again he pressed vehemently for a 'rigid and unsparing system of retrenchment and economy'. He noted with approval that, since he had last spoken, the suspension of Habeas Corpus had been lifted and that the results of the 1818 elections had shown the shigs gaining popularity in the country. But much of his speech was devoted to parliamentary reform which was perhaps not very wise in the circumstances. James Losh noted in his diary:

I though him injudicious in speaking so much about parliamentary reform, as it was evidently his object to avoid pledging himself to any specific plan or specific time for bringing it forward. (45)

Essentially Grey reiterated what he had said the previous year - he still believed in moderate reform, but wished it to be very temperate and not hastily undertaken, but he declaimed at length against wild and impracticable schemes of reform. He deplored the introduction of American methods into English politics and recounted a series of cautionary tales against introducing universal suffrage and the secret ballot. Lambton in his speech referred to the Radicals as 'brawling, ignorant, but mischievous quacks' with whom 'the true people of England hold no communication'. 46

The reaction to Grey's speech was overwhelmingly critical across the whole political spectrum, indeed Grey himself thought that the party would wish to distance themselves from what he had said, although Lambton assured him otherwise.47 The Tyne Mercury pronounced itself all in favour of the principles that he had been promulgated at the Fox dinner, but its suspicions were raised:

...entirely from what was omitted to be said on that occasion... What we apprehend should have been given, and what was undoubtedly expected, was a declaration from the leading speakers what kind of reform it was to which they would give their sanction. (48)

James Perry, the editor of the Morning Chronicle and Sir Robert Wilson, a regular correspondent and associate of Grey, both expressed disappointment at not seeing in the Fox dinner a direct opinion given in favour of triennial parliaments.49 It seemed that
Grey was not attuned to the currents of the time. The Courier secured a great deal of political mileage out of Grey's speech - it was a widely circulated evening paper which its owner Daniel Stuart thought averaged a sale of 8,000 copies a day from 1812-15. Shortly before the meeting of parliament in 1819 it carried an ironical and effective leader misrepresenting the speech at the Newcastle dinner. Much to Grey's annoyance, a week followed with no riposte from the Morning Chronicle and Lambton eventually visited Perry to remonstrate with him, and give him a reply which he had written himself, which was immediately published. But perhaps the most significant reaction to Grey's speech, in terms of its subsequent effects, came from the radical Westminster tailor Francis Place - it was to have a bearing on the famous 1819 Westminster by-election which was fought out between whigs and radicals. Grey's criticism of American methods in English politics perhaps had Place and Westminster as a target. In any case, Place described Grey's references to parliamentary reform as 'apostasy and nonsense' and on 9 February 1819, the report of J.C. Hobhouse's Westminster Committee written by Place was presented to electors and published the following day. The Report described the whigs as a 'turbulent faction' and contained a violent personal attack on Lord Grey. Hobhouse, in fact, had nothing to do with the report and he told Lambton confidentially that he disapproved of the attack on Grey, but he was unable to prevent a more acceptable and moderate whig candidate, William Lamb, being brought into the field who was subsequently victorious.

Lambton had remarked at the 1818 Newcastle dinner that:

> Often as it has fallen to my lot to be present at meetings of this description, there are none that give me so much pleasure as the Newcastle Fox dinners. I have taken a very great interest in the progress of these dinners, and will support them as long as I have life or remain in this country. (55)

But in fact this proved to be the last of the Newcastle Fox dinners, for reasons which highlight some of the important changes in political attitudes which had taken place in Newcastle in a comparatively short period of time after about 1814. Lord Grey did not foresee any problems over future Newcastle Fox dinners as late as September 1819. In the aftermath of what subsequently became known as the Peterloo massacre Grey initially decided against holding county meetings (although subsequently Earl Fitzwilliam's support
for a county meeting in Yorkshire forced whig hands elsewhere). In a letter to Lord Holland his conclusion was that expression of whig views on the subject should be confined to such opportunities as Fox Club dinners might provide. The statement furnishes additional evidence of the importance of such dinners as a comfortable political platform for the whig aristocracy. But the fact was that the Newcastle dinners, at least, could no longer be used in this way. The following letter to Grey from C.W. Bigge, a Northumberland banker, written on 3 January 1820, gives the opinions of virtually all the significant whigs in Newcastle and Northumberland. The letter indicated that it was, in effect, pressure from the liberal middle classes which made it impossible to hold a Newcastle Fox dinner at this time, given Grey's refusal to make a genuine commitment on Parliamentary Reform. It is worth quoting at some length.

I saw Losh and Headlam at Newcastle on Saturday. The former thinks that a Fox dinner might do good, provided that you and the members of parliament who might be present could bring yourselves to make a strong and decided declaration in favour of Parliamentary Reform, but that without such an assurance the meeting would be productive of much harm. He considers that as the vital question in the minds of a greater part of those who would attend. Headlam goes further and is of opinion that the meeting would be very ill attended, and that no good can come from it even if the declarations I have alluded to are distinctly made. My brother [Thomas Bigge], who was appointed a steward, is much against the meeting. My own opinion is with Losh that the success of the meeting depends entirely upon the declarations which you may feel inclined to make, and that if they are not such as would satisfy the promoters of Parliamentary Reform, the dinner had better be given up. I attach great weight to Headlam's opinion as he has constant opportunities of making enquiries among the middling classes of Newcastle and the vicinity. I saw Ridley yesterday and found him inclined to give credit to the opinions of Losh and Headlam... Sir John [Swinburne] agrees with me as to the difficulty of holding the dinner without a specific and decided declaration upon Parliamentary Reform. Blinking this question, running over as the public mind is at the moment, might do great harm.

Writing to Lambton only a month earlier Headlam had been more optimistic as to the whigs' future prospects. He was convinced that if the question of moderate reform was honestly canvassed and zealously supported, and at the same time there was a reduction in public expenditure, "you will attach to you the middle classes and those immediately above the labouring classes" whilst allaying the
frustrations of the lowest reformers. He had, however, stressed that "the language which Lord Grey now holds with respect to Reform in Parliament is most important". 57

The fact that not all Newcastle whigs were avid parliamentary reformers made matters even more complicated - an influential minority were only lukewarm reformers. National party divisions were thus replicated at a local level. Dr. Fenwick explained the difficulties to Christopher Wyvill:

The company which usually assembles there [at Newcastle] is indeed numerous and respectable but they seem to me to hang very loosely together. There are some... who have few if any of Mr. Fox's political principles except that of religious toleration, and even among those who are real whigs not a few are very indifferent to, and some even hostile to Parliamentary Reform... The adherents to Parliamentary Reform are the majority, but still there are a good many of great personal weight who are unfavourable to it, and would perhaps succeed in breaking up the meeting were Reform to be made a primary object. (58)

Chester New published a fuller version of the following famous exchange of letters between Grey and Lambton in January 1820, but he gave the impression that it was their decision, from on high, to abandon the Fox dinner, whereas the fact was that they had little choice in the matter given the strength of local feeling. Grey explicitly admitted as much in a letter to Lord Holland. He noted, rather resignedly, that the only topic in which anyone in the north showed any interest was parliamentary reform. 59 For Grey, the need to keep the party together was paramount, whilst Lambton's frustration at his father-in-law's position was evident. The whig leader wrote thus:

From all I hear, I believe that the public opinion in favour of that measure [Parliamentary Reform] is greatly increased, but I have great doubts whether it is so increased, especially among those whose influence will always be greatest on such questions, as to afford any reasonable hope of its being carried in my life or even during yours.

Despite government measures such as the suspension of Habeas Corpus which prevented mass meetings, the restrictions on the press, the revelations of government spies and the Peterloo incident, Grey's position was the same as that expressed in his letter to Lord Holland in January 1817. Lambton replied:

I am quite convinced from the tenor of your remarks that no good can be done by a Fox dinner, and I therefore
trust the idea will be quite given up. In the present state of the public mind, we should sink 'ten thousand fathoms deep' if we were to hold a meeting, and not make reform a principal and leading topic.

Your anxiety to remain with your friends is quite natural [Lord Fitzwilliam and Lord Holland]... but when that [influence] is exerted to the bane of the most important question that ever existed; on which you have acquired the greatest reputation, I must deeply lament that its power neutralizes your efforts. (60)

Mere talk was no longer enough for the majority of whigs and moderate reformers of Newcastle. The Newcastle Chronicle recollected the enthusiasm which every toast approximating to Reform in Parliament used to be received at all the Fox dinners which had been held in Newcastle.

It is to be hoped that the thunders of applause which shook the room on these occasions, are not to be the only exertions or expressions of sentiments, which the middle and higher classes of Reformers in the neighbourhood feel it necessary to make in support of reform.

Newcastle whigs set about ensuring that enthusiasm for reform did not evaporate in such a vapid expression of their sentiments.61 What was in some ways an alternative Fox dinner was held, on 31 January 1820, of the friends of parliamentary reform, with Sir John Swinburne in the chair. But more importantly than this, a public meeting was held in Newcastle on 26 January to petition for parliamentary reform. Before the meeting, 89 of the most respectable inhabitants of Newcastle, 'including the leading party of whigs of this town', signed a requisition to the Mayor asking to present a petition to Parliament.62 Lambton was active in helping to organize the reformers, although he did not speak at the meeting. The Newcastle Chronicle effectively refuted the suggestion in ministerial newspapers that nothing would have happened in Newcastle without pressure from Lambton and that the public meeting was a consequence of a visit he had paid to the town. The Sun and the Courier also attempted to cast doubt on the repute of those gentlemen who had signed the requisition, but there was no real doubt about their respectability.63 Lambton kept Grey closely informed as to what was going on in Newcastle:

I never saw anything like the eagerness in the middling classes to promote petitions. They could not be persuaded of the difficulties which would attend the convening of the counties of Northumberland and Durham. I rather think we mean to institute an association at the dinner. (64)
The public meeting took place in the Long Room of the Turk's Head Inn - it had to be held inside in order to be exempt from the government's recent legislative acts against public assembly - and this naturally put a limit on the numbers able to attend. Bigge and Ridley spoke at the meeting, but the main speech was made by Losh - the first time he had entered publicly into the political arena. The speech was enthusiastically received by those present - the main argument being that parliaments should be shorter than the existing seven years and that the right of returning MPs should be taken from the decayed and corrupt or dependent boroughs and given to the large unrepresented towns and the larger counties. These were not particularly radical proposals. Losh went on to state his objections to annual parliaments, universal suffrage and election by ballot, albeit to some disapprobation. 3,016 people signed the subsequent petition to parliament from the merchants, bankers and tradesmen of Newcastle, which was presented to the House of Commons by Sir Matthew White Ridley on 12 May 1820. Ridley vouched for the respectability of the signatories from personal knowledge. Lambton, seconding the petition, described the petitioners thus:

They principally belonged to that class of society which had not hitherto taken so great a share in the consideration of public affairs as, he was persuaded, it would be highly advantageous to the country they should do - he meant the middle class. (67)

It would be a mistake, of course, to think in terms of a single middle class in Newcastle and, in any case, the opinion of the middle classes in the town was far from unanimous. Many merchants, bankers and tradesmen were supporters of the government and of the Tory Corporation in Newcastle, whilst other members of the professional classes who had signed the requisition to the mayor and the subsequent parliamentary petition were in favour of more radical reform - men such as John Fife, John Macleod, Charles Larkin, and Thomas Hodgson. It was for this reason that the resolutions of the petition were not specific and only called vaguely for shortening the duration of parliament, extending the suffrage and disfranchising decayed boroughs in favour of larger towns and counties. As Peter Cadogan has observed, 'such declarations were open to a wide variety of mutually hostile interpretations.' Nevertheless, the Newcastle petition of 1820 was important. 3,016 might seem like a relatively small number, but what mattered was not so much the quantity as the quality of the signatures. These were people whose opinions really
mattered in the eyes of many parliamentary whigs - far more so than the estimated 70,000 less socially elevated individuals who had met on Newcastle Town Moor the previous year to voice their disapproval of the actions of Manchester magistrates at St. Peter's Fields. The extent to which the Newcastle petitioners mattered in the eyes of Lord Grey is more questionable, although his views on parliamentary reform did undergo a significant change during the course of 1820. In April he found himself reluctantly aware that 'nine-tenths of the lower and middling ranks' were 'eagerly bent' on reform. By the end of the year he was prepared to make moderate reform a 'sine qua non' of whig acceptance of office. He suggested privately that 100 seats should be re-distributed from the least representative small boroughs to new industrial towns and larger counties and the establishment of quinquennial parliaments. The debacle of the government's attempt to introduce a Bill of Pains and Penalties against Queen Caroline, increasing agricultural distress, and the desire to take political advantage of the shift in public opinion against Lord Liverpool's government, all contributed towards solidifying Grey's commitment to parliamentary reform should the whigs form a government in the future. The numerous and enthusiastic reception given to Grey by the people of his native Northumberland in November 1820, on his return from London, following a widely reported speech opposed to the Bill directed against Queen Caroline, had a powerful effect on the whig leader. The crowds which greeted him were said to have included 'every tradesman of Alnwick and multitudes of the most respectable farmers, all well mounted, their hats and horses' heads covered with blue ribbons'. At a Northumberland county meeting in January 1821, Grey went so far as to call for 'a complete and total change in the system of government' and added that parliamentary reform should be a principal feature in the change of system that was necessary, although, as Professor Cannon has pointed out, he continued to be adept at hedging his bets and qualifying his commitment. Whether reform was to be pressed as an indispensable object upon the whigs coming to power was a question which 'must be determined by consideration of expediency at the time'.

Dr. Dinwiddy has described the Fox dinners, which were held across the country, as 'essentially gatherings of the faithful, presided over by the grandees of the party'. And indeed H.G.Bennet could describe the 1813 Newcastle Fox dinner as 'a beat up for political friends - as a sort of levée'. But the fact that, after
1819, the Newcastle Fox dinners could not be used as a forum for Lord Grey to say what he liked, as they had been earlier in the decade, shows that the faithful were no longer prepared to be passive spectators. The demise of the Newcastle dinners was one indicator, of many, that the liberal middle classes could no longer be taken for granted. In the not too distant future Grey would come to recognize that the whig party had to travel faster than the pace of its least enthusiastic reformers.
FOOTNOTES:


2. Norfolk Fox Club dinner in 1820, for example, secured an attendance of 460 and at the first public Edinburgh Fox dinner in January 1821 over 500 people sat down to eat - '180 dined in another room and came in afterwards. Every corner, even the window recesses were crammed'. [Department of Palaeography and Diplomatic, Grey Manuscript Collection, University of Durham. (Henceforth Grey MSS. ) Lambton to Grey, 13 Jan.1821.]


4. E.g. 98 guests in 1814, 80 in 1816 and 62 in 1818.


6. P. Cadogan, Early Radical Newcastle (Consett, 1975), p.21; Creevey MSS. (Northumberland Record Office) 324/L17/2 Brougham to Thomas Creevey 7 Feb. 1814. Pitt had written in 1779, 'I do not wish to be thought enlisted in any party or to call myself anything but an independent Whig, which in words is hardly a distinction, as everyone alike pretends to it'. He was a member of Brook's Club from 1781 onwards. [Quoted in English Historical Documents 1783-1832 (eds. A. Aspinall and E.A. Smith, London, 1959), p.16.] For the 'Mountain' M.P.s see below p.92.


8. Tyne Mercury, 21 Sept. 1813.


11. Ibid.

12. Grey MSS Lambton to Grey, 13 Jan. 1821. In this case Lambton was referring to the Edinburgh dinner.


20. Hughes, Losh, 1, p.27. Of the meeting generally, Losh observed 'I trust it will do good; at any rate it shews that all have not bowed the Knee to Boal'.


23. Ibid.


33. B.L. Add MSS 30109 Lambton to Sir Robert Wilson 28 Sept. 1817


37. Hughes, Losh 1, p. 71.

38. Ibid. 1, p. 40.


42. Trevelyan, Lord Grey, p. 163; Grey to Lady Grey, 25 Dec. 1818. This letter does not appear to exist in the present collection of Grey's letters to his wife in the Department of Palaeography and Diplomatic, University of Durham.


44. Tyne Mercury, 5 Jan. 1819. The Courier, 6 Jan. 1819, argued that the dinner was postponed for different reasons, which cast the whigs in a bad light.

45. Hughes, Losh 1, p. 85.

46. Tyne Mercury, 5 Jan. 1819.

47. Grey MSS Lambton to Grey, 16 Jan. 1819.


53. Authentic Narrative of the Westminster Election of 1819 (London, 1819). This was a joint work by Place and Hobhouse designed to expose the whigs' conduct.

54. Grey MSS Lambton to Grey, 12 Feb. 1819.
55. Tyne Mercury, 5 Jan. 1819.
64. Grey MSS, Lambton to Grey, 15 Jan. 1820.
67. Tyne Mercury, 16 May 1820.
68. P. Cadogan, Early Radical Newcastle (Consett, 1975), p. 44.
69. The number of people who attended the meeting on Newcastle Town Moor is difficult to estimate with any accuracy. J. Sykes, Local Records etc. 2 Vols. (Newcastle, 1833) gives a figure of between 76,000 and 100,000 II, p. 124. But Alderman Reed, the mayor, gave a figure of 40,000 in a communication to the Home Office. Cf. N. McCord, 'Tyneside Discontents and Peterloo' in Northern History, II, 1967, p. 104.
70. Grey MSS, Grey to Holland, 12 April and 6 Dec. 1820.
71. Grey MSS, Pamphlet Collection No. 1836. The quotation is taken from a vivid eyewitness account of Grey's entry into Alnwick 'from an Irish Paper, Nov. 1820'.
74. Maxwell, Creevey, I., p. 187.
THE RISE AND FALL OF THE YORK WHIG CLUB 1818-1830

For a three year period, from about 1819 to 1821, York was somewhat surprisingly at the forefront of the movement for parliamentary reform. Reports of the declarations and dinners of the York Whig Club were given prominence in national newspapers such as The Morning Chronicle and The Times, as well as liberal Yorkshire newspapers such as the York Herald, the Leeds Mercury, the Hull Rockingham and the Sheffield Iris, and branches of the club were established at London and Manchester by freemen of York resident in these cities. A declaration of the political principles of the club issued on 8 February 1819 entertained the hope that the club might be the catalyst for a nationwide movement: 'From the efforts of a single city, trivial effects only can be expected — Yet though we may, in personal importance be inconsiderable, we may be powerful by the Influence of Example!' But the attempt to establish Whig clubs across the country never really gathered any momentum and only a handful of counties organized similar associations. The York Whig Club did not finally disband until late 1830 but, although it enjoyed a brief resurgence during the General Elections of 1826 and 1830, it had been practically defunct for six or seven years. An account of the rise and fall of the club is of more than local significance, since some of the answers to the questions as to why York was particularly conducive for the establishment of a united reform movement and why the club went into such a rapid decline in 1822-23 throw light on the failure of reformers across the country to achieve the desired breakthrough at this time.

The period following the war against revolutionary France was aptly described by Halevy as 'The Liberal Awakening'. A feeling grew in the 1810's and 1820's that government power was insufficiently controlled by the people. A variety of groups on the reforming wing of the Whig party such as 'The Mountain' faction in parliament, the Edinburgh Reviewers, and a younger generation of aristocratic Whigs aimed, in varying degrees, to associate the Whigs more closely with the progressive elements in society, the informal 'political nation' in the constituencies, the liberal middle classes, many of whom were excluded from the political process and were looking to the Whig party to protect and articulate their interests. On the other hand, several of the most influential aristocratic leaders of the party continued to be unpersuaded of the necessity for parliamentary reform
and expressed a distaste for pandering to popular opinion and any kind of 'association' outside parliament. This attitude was evident, for example, in the answers that Lord Holland received when he wrote to several Whig leaders early in 1813 attempting to organize a joint dinner for dissenting leaders and Whigs. Lord Grenville wrote back to him:

The obvious objection to them [Public dinners and Political Associations] is that a few hotheaded men always take the lead in such proceedings and that their absurdities are then made to attach on all who concur in the general object,

whilst Lord Lansdowne replied with icy distaste '...political clubs are quite contrary to my principles.' Lord Fitzwilliam, the leading Whig magnate in Yorkshire held similar opinions. Such men feared what they perceived as the 'levelling' aspirations of the working classes, and the extreme and militant nature of radical demands for universal suffrage and annual parliaments voiced by leaders such as Hunt, Cobbett and Burdett. Politics during this period was organized on very much a local and regional basis. National party organization only began to develop in an embryonic form following the Reform Act of 1832, and even then the Whig leadership tended to resist efforts to create constituency parties for fear that it would have the effect of giving too great a weight to the views of the rank and file. There was not one centrally directed reform movement in the years 1815-1832 but a series of independently organised efforts in towns and counties across the country, each of which was affected by local circumstances and preoccupations. It is thus important to establish a clearer connection between local political organizations, and national parties and issues.

The county of Yorkshire prided itself on providing a lead on issues of national concern such as economic reform in the 1780's, the agitation against the Slave Trade and parliamentary reform. The victory of Henry Brougham at the General Election of 1830 was intended to send a message to the whole country. In parts of Yorkshire the inequalities of the electoral system had become particularly glaring: Leeds, Sheffield and Bradford, for example, were not independently represented in parliament. York was not so ill-favoured as this, possessing two M.P.s and a relatively large freeman electorate. There was a desire, however, to rid the city of the widespread bribery and corruption which took place at elections, and to expand the electorate to include non-freeman householders. This account
of the York Whig Club, which briefly stood in the front ranks of provincial reform organizations, explores the relationship between 'county' and 'city' interests, describes how aristocratic Whigs and the county gentry wrestled with their reform consciences, how the liberal middle classes of York grew increasingly self-confident and assertive, and how they in turn came to be challenged by men advocating more radical political remedies. It analyses the reasons why the reform movement in York, as nationally, seemed to grind to a halt in the mid 1820's, in the face of political and social divisions amongst Whigs and radicals, but more significantly in consequence of an economic upturn and the increasing popularity of the policies of 'liberal Tories' such as Canning and Huskisson.

Although York had been the focus of considerable political activity in the 1780's and 1790's, by the second decade of the nineteenth century the city was politically quiescent. Those on the liberal side of questions were even less active than their Tory counterparts who from 1815 held regular, if ill-attended, dinners every year on 28 May to celebrate the anniversary of William Pitt's birthday. A correspondent in the radical-Whig York Herald in February 1814, having observed a report of the celebration of the anniversary of Charles James Fox's birthday in London in the previous edition of the paper, expressed surprise that there was no such event at York. Similarly, in October 1815, the same journal's enthusiasm to establish a Whitbread Club, such as that recently formed at Carlisle, in order to celebrate the reforming principles of the late Samuel Whitbread, brought a resounding lack of response from its readers. 'A Citizen of York' in January 1817 criticized the apathy of the city in the face of what he regarded as the repressive legislation of Lord Liverpool's Tory administration:

In times far less perilous than the present, the political energy of this city has shone predominant... yet we calmly walk our streets — inquire into the state of the weather — the hour of the day — or gaze into the newest shop window for the flimsy fashion last in vogue. Whence this degeneracy?... (5)

The charge was not entirely fair: inhabitants had met to petition against the continuation of the property tax in February 1815 and had protested against the large military establishment which it was proposed to maintain. The meeting recommended economy and retrenchment as the only means of reducing the national debt. Another meeting was held in February 1817 'to consider the measures best to
be adopted in the present alarming state of public affairs', and was attended by an estimated 3,000 people. But it took the result of the General Election in July 1818 to prod York Whigs into real action.

Nationally the Whig party made some gains at the 1818 election, but they were not commensurate with the unpopularity of the government, and Lord Liverpool's administration maintained a fairly comfortable majority in the House of Commons. At York, the Tory M.P. Sir Mark Sykes managed to hold on to his seat in the face of a strong challenge from a reforming candidate, Colonel William Bryan Cooke of Wheatley. A meeting of the freemen of York on 8 June, attended by about four or five hundred men, had resolved to return another member in place of the strongly anti-catholic, anti-reforming Sykes, and some days later Cooke was settled upon as their candidate (the seat of Lawrence Dundas, York's Whig M.P. since 1811, was widely reckoned to be safe). Although Cooke was described in the York Courant as 'another candidate from... Wentworth House', he stood independently from the powerful Fitzwilliam influence. Cooke contended that had he arrived earlier and spent a little more money upon his entrance into the city, he would have had a fair chance of success. He also pointed out that of 612 freemen who had signed their names in his support, over a half had broken their promises in the face of the large scale bribery resorted to by Sykes. As Robert Chaloner reported to Lord Fitzwilliam, the Whigs' future electoral prospects looked bright:

There is such a strong anti-ministerialist spirit in this place that I am positive it only requires good management to secure the return of two Whigs whenever a fair opportunity shall occur. (11)

The lead in securing a second 'independent', non-Tory candidate at York, however, was to be taken not by Fitzwilliam's election agents but by a new institution — The York Whig Club.

The club was officially established at a meeting held at Etridge's Hotel on 18 September 1818. It pledged to support the Constitution as established at the Glorious Revolution of 1688, a treasured landmark in Whig mythology, and resolved that the best way to do this would be to elect Members of Parliament who would prevent encroachments on the Rights and Liberties of the nation 'and on all occasions, strenuously advocate such plans of Economy and Reform, as are most likely to soothe the sufferings, and relieve
the oppressions of an injured People'. A further resolution regretted the corrupt influence which pervaded the House of Commons resulting from a mere 154 patrons having the power to return 307 M.P.s by direct or indirect means (the figures were taken from a report of the committee of 'The Friends of the People' published in 1792-93). A series of eleven other resolutions dealt in detail with the future management and organization of the society. 

For the subsequent activities and fortunes of the club, reports in the York Herald, under its editor William Hargrove, provide the most detailed, though not always most reliable, guide. Hargrove assumed ownership of the paper in June 1813 and subsequently wrote a very good two volume history of York. He was an enthusiastic supporter of parliamentary reform and the Whig Club, and became personally involved in its organization as chairman of the Whig Club Committee, a discussion group which met monthly from April, 1819, and as a Vice-President of the club from February 1821. Not surprisingly, however, his involvement with the club led him to gloss over setbacks and problems in the club's later years, and he probably had an over-inflated sense of his own importance and powers of oratory. After he spoke at a mass meeting in York on 20 September 1819 which expressed outrage at the conduct of the civil authorities of Manchester at St. Peter's Fields, he had handed his speech to a reporter from The Times and was outraged when only the substance of what he had said was given in the published report. The Times however, was unrepentant at its abridgement of what it described as 'an inflated and silly speech'. After April 1819 an alternative view of the activities of the York Whig Club is presented by the Yorkshire Gazette which was established to advocate 'the principles of Mr. Pitt'. The paper supported the aims of the York King and Constitution Club, which was formed in November 1818 as a counter to the Whig Club. The Tory club abhorred 'those mischievous doctrines of Reform which have lately been revived and industriously propagated', whilst the Yorkshire Gazette constantly did its best to ridicule the Whig Club and downplay any apparent achievements. For many years, the Herald and the Gazette were involved in bruising guerilla warfare, conducted through the vehicle of their editorial columns, of a kind characteristic of rival provincial newspapers. Through a discerning reading of the two papers in conjunction, a reasonably accurate account of the history of the York Whig Club can be obtained.
The club was far from being the sole focus of Whig power in the city; there were two other powerful and interconnected sources of authority — the Corporation and Lord Fitzwilliam. The former, self-elected and overwhelmingly Whig in composition, was a citadel of Whig patronage and influence. R.H. Anderson, a one time treasurer of the York Whig Club, in giving evidence to the commissioners investigating the existing state of the corporation of York in 1833, prior to the Municipal Reform Act of 1835, stated that 'all the best offices in their gift are, I believe, invariably in the possession of Whigs'. The Town Clerk, recorder, city counsel and eight out of nine of the aldermen were Whigs, although Anderson added that 'the Whiggism of the corporation is very closely connected with one side of Whiggism only'. (He meant the moderate Whiggism of Fitzwilliam.)\textsuperscript{17} The 	extit{Yorkshire Gazette} in March 1820 reported that it was the policy of the corporation to exclude non-Whigs from the magistrates bench and, of sixteen magistrates, knew of only one who entertained political opinions differing from those of the corporation. Such patronage naturally also worked its way down to subordinate departments and employment. It was alleged that the poll book, the public record of how individual freemen had voted, guided and regulated each corporator's proceedings.\textsuperscript{18} But despite the Whig monopoly of authority in York and the fact that Samuel Nicoll, the Club's president, was the city's legal counsel, the corporation did not welcome the Whig Club as an ally and remained largely aloof from it. At the Club's annual dinner in September 1820 Alderman Dunslay noted that not many members of the corporation were present, 'yet he flattered himself that the York Whig Club had their good wishes and was pretty certain that in a short time there would be a considerable increase to it, by the admission of several more of the members of the corporation'.\textsuperscript{20} The expected accession of corporation members never took place, however, and in December 1821 the 	extit{Gazette} reported the corporation's virtual separation from the Club. It published a list of the members of the corporation who attended the annual dinner of that year and those who were absent; only nine members were present and 112 absent.\textsuperscript{20} It is possible that aldermen, common council men and other prominent members of the corporation were taking their lead from Lawrence (now Lord) Dundas who had been invested as Lord Mayor in January 1821. He refused to act as chairman for the dinner in December 1821 and dismissed a deputation from the Club when they went to the Mansion House to demand personally
'his direct reasons for not dining with and presiding over them'.

The prominence of the Dundas family in York's politics was in turn a reflection of Fitzwilliam influence and financial backing. The two families were closely connected through marriage; the mother of Lawrence Dundas was Lady Charlotte Wentworth, favourite sister of the fourth Earl Fitzwilliam (1748-1833), and Lord Milton, the future fifth Earl Fitzwilliam (1786-1857), was married to his cousin Mary Dundas.

Fitzwilliam had inherited the Whig interest in York from the Marquis of Rockingham in the early 1780's. His authority in the city varied, but apart from the period 1783-87, when the Yorkshire Association temporarily pushed Fitzwilliam influence aside, at least one of the two M.P.s was sponsored, or actively favoured by the fourth Earl until 1830 and beyond. York was no proprietary borough in the mode of Richmond, Higham Ferrers, Peterborough or Malton, however, and candidates desirous of success had to canvass a variety of interests and prove themselves acceptable to the electorate. By contrast, in an invitation to Sir Francis Wood to stand as a candidate at Peterborough in 1819, Fitzwilliam wrote 'with great confidence, that my recommendation will be chosen without contest — the expense attending an election £1,000 — a little attention from time to time expended'.

With approximately 2,500 resident freemen and over 1,000 outvoters York was both difficult to control, and very expensive. Two General Elections in 1818 and 1820 and a by-election in 1820, cost Fitzwilliam a total of £25,000, which was enough to dent even his very healthy bank balance. Money was also ploughed into York in non-election years in the form of donations on Fitzwilliam's or Dundas's behalf — there were contributions, for example, to benevolent and charitable societies, local schools, York races, the maintenance of the city hounds, the upkeep of prisoners in the city gaol, the establishment of soup kitchens in times of economic distress, and building projects such as the construction of the Ouse Bridge. Such a financial outlay naturally gave Fitzwilliam considerable influence in the city — and, predictably, the Gazette regularly inveighed against the invidious machinations of Wentworth House. In 1809, for example, Fitzwilliam had a crucial say in the appointment of a doctor to York's Lunatic Asylum and five doctors wrote to solicit his support. A certain amount of prestige was also attached to being the power behind one of York's parliamentary seats, because not only was the city important 'as constituting one of the most numerous and independent bodies in the Kingdom', but the...
result of elections there were regarded as 'a kind of touchstone of the disposition of that celebrated and opulent county'. The York Whig Club was bound to face problems coming to terms with Fitzwilliam's influence in both the city and county of York — not only was he a proprietor of rotten boroughs but he was actively opposed to any measures of parliamentary reform. The attitudes adopted towards the Whig Club by the Corporation and Lord Fitzwilliam were to be important factors in its development. Over four years the postures of the two seem to have varied between benevolent neutrality, passive indifference and mild hostility. Never could it be said that the York Whig Club managed to enlist the unreserved support of either.

In the first few months of the Club, however, there were a few clouds on the horizon. Meetings were invariably reported to be 'very numerous and respectable' and many members were enrolled. The dinners given to Colonel Cooke, in November 1818 in honour of his gallant defeat at the election and in commemoration of the birth of Fox in January 1819, were in many respects Whig Club dinners, although differences among the various shades of Whig emerged at the latter. The former dinner was attended by 211 people 'consisting of some of the most respectable gentlemen and tradesmen in York and its vicinity; a number unequalled in magnitude on any former occasion'. The chairman, Sir George Cayley, noted that most of the members of the Club were present and constituted a large part of the meeting and devoted most of his speech to singing the Club's praises. He was uncertain whether persons unconnected with the city were allowed to become honorary members, but if they could, he expressed a wish to join — 'I avail myself of the opportunity to express a hope that the county may follow the example of the city, and establish a Whig Club'. The other main speaker, Alderman William Dunslay reported that although the Club was in its infancy, 'I have great pleasure in informing you... that it is sure to flourish if supported with half that enthusiasm which marked its commencement'.

The Fox dinner was chaired by Lawrence Dundas and attended by 120 people. The Whig Club presence was more muted but nonetheless strong — and an important exchange of views took place between Cayley and Dundas. Upon the raising of a toast to the Club, Dundas explained his attitude towards it; he could not agree with all its resolutions or pledge himself to an undefined system of reform —
a spirit of indiscriminate change arising from the evils of the French Revolution was dangerous and, although he approved of strengthening the power of the people in the House of Commons, he loved the English constitution and did not think 'that every new projector is qualified to bolt an improvement onto it'. Cayley, for his part, stressed that the Club held out no specific plans for the attainment of parliamentary reform and argued that the county had been long enough frightened with the bug-bear of the French Revolution — the object of the reformers had nothing in common with revolutions:

Great difference of opinion must exist on this subject, which it must be impossible to reconcile; but still, those who agree in the necessity for some reform, may act together to obtain some specific object. (30)

Cayley's arguments and reassurances together with the subsequent publication of the first detailed declaration of the political views and principles of the York Whig Club may have had some effect on moderate Whigs. A month later the York Herald reported that Dundas and Sir William Milner, the son of a former M.P., had been admitted as members. The manifesto was a classic political compromise intended to include the complete spectrum of reformers. There were references to the 'Pressure of Taxation' and the 'Decay of Trade', criticism of the government's system of 'spies and informers' and the predictable espousal of economy, retrenchment and liberty of the press. The club further pronounced itself in favour of 'RADICAL REFORM', which phrase, however, was so heavily qualified as to be meaningless:

...by this term, we mean nothing lending towards Turbulence, or dangerous to established Authorities...
At present, proposing, as a Body, nothing specific, we wish to fix no tie on our Associates, and conceive each individual Member free to support the Principles of the Club, on the Plan he himself shall most approve. (31)

Four hundred copies of the declaration were printed and sent to members and to such gentlemen in the city and county as were known to be favourable to the cause. It seemed as if moderate Whig opinion was swinging behind the Club. A less charitable interpretation of Dundas's actions, however, would argue that he realised that George III was an old and sick man and thus a General Election was likely in the near future. It would be electorally unwise to be too far out of step with the majority of freemen in York, who favoured parliamentary reform.
One of the reasons for the early success of the Club was that it could lay claim to the essential quality of respectability. It did not prove necessary to establish a separate Whig Club for the county of Yorkshire, since the city of York cast its nets out into the countryside. In February 1819 the President of the Club, Samuel William Nicoll, wrote to the veteran parliamentary reformer, the Reverend Christopher Wyvill enclosing a copy of its declaration of principles; 'We wish first to combine all classes of the county, and then to think of the precise mode of proceeding... we have got a few country gentlemen... also several persons out of the counties of the middle classes — in all between 2 and 300'. These were the sort of men Godfrey Higgins, a West Riding magistrate from Ferrybridge, had addressed earlier in an open letter published in January 1817 calling upon them to place themselves at the head of the reform movement.

At that time, although a requisition circulated in Yorkshire and a county meeting was mooted, apprehension that any meeting would be swamped by radical extremists led to the project being dropped. Two years later, it was thus a considerable triumph for the Whig Club to achieve such a respectable membership, and whenever prominent names joined the society the Herald proclaimed the fact — noting, for example, that Sir Henry Mervin Vavasour Bart. of Melbourne Hall, Yorks. and Admiral Tatham resident in York were balloted in as members in April 1819.

At the same time, the Club was able to maintain the support of many of the freemen of York, who were predominantly of the artisan classes. With no established large-scale industry, York lacked a manufacturing working class; the city's economic 'raison d'etre' was as a market serving an extensive rural hinterland, and as a distribution centre for goods and services. The most striking characteristic of the male labour force in York in the first half of the nineteenth century was the vast proportion engaged in miscellaneous handicraft and retailing operations. The retail trade was 'supported by the many genteel and opulent families in York and its respectable vicinage'. There was also an above average proportion of male employment in public and professional services, along with banking and insurance. York's social structure was thus very different from neighbouring industrial towns and this contributed towards the early success of the York Whig Club. Probably the main reason that the Club was not subjected to a vigorous attack on its radical flank was that the city lacked a disaffected manufacturing
working class to provide the necessary impetus and initiative.

A possible rival to the Whig Club among the labouring classes did appear in the middle of 1819 but had faded away by early 1820. On 3 July 1819 the Herald announced and welcomed the formation of a Society of Political Protestants in York. But William Hargrove, in justifying his support for the Club and his attendance at one of their meetings, put a very favourable gloss on the aims of the Political Protestants and the Gazette relished the opportunity of putting the Club's objectives and the publications of associated societies in Yorkshire under the microscope. Amongst the objectives of Political Protestants were the introduction of annual parliaments and universal suffrage, and the Gazette, assuming a union between Political Protestants in Hull, Leeds, Wakefield and York, quoted from a report in a publication called The Democrat; or Political Protestant's Register written by the secretary of the Hull society,

> Our institution of Political Protestants has now broken its way into the very antiquated and aristocratical city of York, in direct opposition to the trickery of a Whig Club which has been recently introduced there, to draw the Reformers into cunning snares.

The Gazette took the opportunity to attempt to drive a wedge between Whigs and radicals. In fact, the York society proved to be no more than a lukewarm version of its extreme Hull counterpart and little more was heard of it. In September 1819, at the York City meeting following what became known as the Peterloo Massacre, working class radicals such as Thomas Walker, a cabinet maker, and Walls 'a journeyman printer' did manage to secure a certain prominence by sharing a platform with the likes of Dundas, Nicoll and Cooke, but whilst this would have been socially embarrassing for the latter, politically it was the 'respectable'classes who continued to set the reforming agenda at this time. A.J. Peacock is undoubtedly correct to infer that the Whig Club absorbed the Political Protestants at some time in the first half of 1820 — a total of 138 new members, including some prominent radicals were admitted to the club between April and June of that year. It is doubtful, however, whether this infusion into the Whig Club of so many members from the lower orders was to its long term benefit.

The Club benefitted in its early years from the leadership of Samuel William Nicoll; he was an inveterate organizer and, since he was resident in York, was always on hand to chivvy activity. Under
its constitution the Club was only obliged to meet half yearly, in addition to holding an annual dinner at such time and place as was appointed by the Committee, but in both 1819 and 1820 members met much more often than this 'for the purpose of conversation, discussion, and excitement to ardent and manly perseverance in the good cause'. Nor did members confine themselves solely to talk. In July 1819 the Club was responsible for the establishment of a special committee distinct from the Whig Club, which was formed to support the interest of Colonel Cooke as a future M.P. for York and of which Nicoll was deputy chairman. It issued declarations berating the government for its tyrannical policies and calling for the dismissal of ministers and an entire change of the electoral system in both October 1819 and October 1820 and was a perpetual force behind requisitions calling for public meetings. Following Lord Fitzwilliam's dismissal from the post of Lord Lieutenant of the West Riding in November 1819, it adopted an address 'highly approving his conduct' and the Club was predictably active in support of attacks on the Manchester magistrates in the wake of Peterloo, and in upholding Queen Caroline's cause in 1820. The hostile Gazette likened Nicoll sarcastically to Napoleon Bonaparte, but this was indicative of the strength of his political generalship. He was a prime mover behind both the city meeting, and the more significant county meeting chaired by Fitzwilliam following the events in Manchester. If such meetings were to be successful and run according to plan, the resolutions and personnel upon the platform required a great deal of prior preparation. It took all of Nicoll's powers of persuasion, for example, to get Cooke to speak at the county meeting rather than attend the St. Leger Race at Doncaster! Temporarily at least, Nicoll was able to act as a bridge between different classes of reformer. This was his avowed aim at the first annual dinner of the Club in September 1820 — to unite 'gentlemen of rank and fortune', the middle classes, and artisans in 'a sound, efficacious and enlightened political combination'. Moreover, Nicoll led from the front during the time that he was President, publishing two long and closely argued letters to the members of the York Whig Club in pamphlet form in October and November 1819. 'A Yorkshire Freeholder', an anonymous Tory pamphleteer, had challenged Nicoll, earlier in 1819, to justify his views on parliamentary reform and accused him of dealing too much in generalities.
Nicoll explained why his own sentiments with regard to reform had changed since the public meeting held in the Guildhall in York in February 1817, and his views are probably representative of the evolving attitudes of members of the liberally inclined professional middle classes. On that occasion he had expressed himself frightened by the snowballing demands for reform and cautious of possible consequences. So long as meetings of the people had a due influence on parliamentary proceedings and Parliament, however partially elected, was representative of the whole nation, and echoed its opinions, he had been satisfied that the system was adequate. By 1819 he was convinced that the people's influence had long ceased and 'that where they can no longer indirectly control, they ought directly to appoint'.

The people (by which he appears to have meant the artisan class of skilled workmen) had become much better educated and politically aware over the previous thirty years through the medium of pamphlets, newspapers, songs and handbills. He had first become conscious of this change at the meeting of February 1817; upon parliamentary reform being slightly alluded to, probably 3,000 people had at once proclaimed their desire for universal suffrage. York had no communication with the manufacturing districts and no zealous political missionaries had appeared amongst the population, thus it could only be from 'a political progress common to the whole Kingdom' that reforming principles prevailed. Nicoll was now convinced that, whilst he could not answer for every public meeting or every man present at any public meeting, the general tenor of the Reformers' conduct was not of a revolutionary disposition. In his second letter, after providing a historical retrospect of previous reforms in the constitution, Nicoll noted that the two principal points of reform were the duration of each parliament and the extension of the suffrage. With regard to the former, he came down in favour of triennial parliaments, although election expenses would have to be restrained because the independent gentry could not readily sustain a repetition of election contests. On the latter question he remained non-committal, although he expressed his opposition to universal suffrage. The York Whig Club could not, on a subject of such importance, pretend to take a leading part — it should await the course of events. In response to criticisms of his former letter which had been declared unworthy of attention because it was 'a mere party production' he denied all party motives and purposes — 'I wish to see the Whigs in power for the sake of the
country, not for their own; because I think they alone can quiet the discontents which are prevalent'.

In fact the Club did not wait long before stating its own views. By issuing its second declaration on the subject of parliamentary reform in January 1820 the Club came off the fence and advocated a detailed manifesto of changes. It called for triennial parliaments, the disfranchisement of all rotten and corrupt boroughs, the transfer of seats to more populous towns, household suffrage, more equal electoral districts, the secret ballot in parochial elections, and all votes at General Elections to be taken on the same day. The Club called on the country at large to second its efforts, 'by such petitions and declarations as may by each town or district be deemed expedient'. It is possible that an influx of former Political Protestants contributed towards making the declaration more radical than might have expected, but more likely that the progression from not advocating specific policies should be seen as an indication of the burgeoning confidence of provincial Whiggism.

The fact that there was a severe winter in 1819/20 gave additional impetus to the reforming cause. In January 1820 the soup kitchen in York was daily selling over 2,000 quarts at 1d. a quart and cheap coals were also delivered — 6,000 bushels at the low price of 5d. a bushel. A contemporary York newspaper was quoted in the Gazette as describing the Whig Club as 'moving somewhere in a sphere between the Whigs and the Radicals, a little above the mud, but not out of the smoke'. In a backhanded way, this was an unintended compliment — it was rare for Whigs and radicals to be able to find a via media, but such a compromise was achieved at York. The Club described the declaration thus:

It has all the essential principles of the system approved by the more liberal Whigs; and, at the same time, comprises such a portion of the views of those who have hitherto advocated the necessity of a Reform to the fullest extent, as may prove satisfactory to them and yet cannot be a source of apprehension to others. (54)

There is evidence that, before publishing its declaration, the Club consulted with parliamentary Whigs favourable to reform. They had written to J.G.Lambton, the future Lord Durham, in the autumn of 1819 appealing to him for guidance, and the resolutions of January 1820 incorporated much of his advice. Success thus characterised the first two years of the York Whig Club, culminating in the election of the reforming Marmaduke
Wyvill as York's second M.P. in March 1820. Wyvill was acceptable both to the Whig Club and Wentworth House. He was invited to stand by the York freemen and proposed on the hustings by their initial choice, Colonel Cooke, but most if not all of his election expenses were paid by Fitzwilliam. Certainly the Gazette had no doubts as to where the money was coming from to pay for the bandsmen, messengers and multifarious election 'assistants'. Dundas and Wyvill, in contrast to 1818, professed an open coalition and canvassed together — but the latter was not exactly a Fitzwilliam nominee. As Chalenor wrote to the earl, 'Wyvill should be put as much as possible as the member chosen by the Whigs independent of your interest', and it was made clear that a public subscription or Wyvill's own resources (he was shortly to inherit his father's estates) should be the means of his future representation. On the Tory side Sir Mark Sykes declined, and was out of the country at the time of the election. It looked as if the two Whigs would be elected unopposed until the late arrival of Lord Howden to stand unsuccessfully in the Tory interest. The Whig Club cannot have been too impressed by their candidates' performances upon the hustings, where Dundas remarked that the Constitution was 'so vigorous and excellent, that there was no necessity for any new measures to mend it'. Wyvill, too, perhaps conscious of an obligation to his financial backer, did not commit himself as to the extent of reform that he believed should be implemented. Nevertheless, he was to speak in favour of parliamentary reform when it was debated in the House of Commons, and overall the election could be represented as a triumph for the Club. A few months later Chalenor quietly replaced Dundas at an uncontested election when his brother-in-law was elevated to the peerage. Chalenor was to be one of the main speakers at the first annual dinner of the Whig Club in September 1820.

The course of events throughout the country, but in Yorkshire in particular, ran strongly in the Club's favour in its first two years. For most of the time it had an unlikely but powerful ally in Earl Fitzwilliam who presided at the famous county meeting in October 1819, following Peterloo. Lawrence Dundas's speech at York Guildhall on 20 September, when he publicly demanded a Peterloo inquiry was the first hint of a break in the Whig opposition's neutrality concerning the events at Manchester. The subsequent lead of Fitzwilliam and Milton, in signing a requisition for a
Yorkshire county meeting, removed the doubts of Lord Grey and other Whig leaders about the advisability of such meetings. Milton wrote to Sir F.L.Wood:

> It is of the utmost importance to conciliate the lower orders and to shew we are as zealous of the rights of the subject, when violated in their case as we should be in our own.

An influential factor in persuading Milton that a county meeting could be successfully organized was an account he had received from William Cooke of the meeting at York, 'where everything was carried in an assembly of 3 or 4,000 persons according to the wishes of the moderate party — and this notwithstanding evident marks of irritation and anger on the part of the lower classes in consequence of what passed at Manchester'.

Hesitation had been produced by a desire to avoid associating the party with mob orators and extreme schemes of reform. Fearing that government power was in danger of becoming uncontrolled, Fitzwilliam felt that here was a case where great landowners should lead the people and uphold their constitutional right to hold meetings and petition parliament. He desired no intemperate language, however:

> No expressions of yeomanry cutting and slashing, no breasts of the mother sliced off, nor babes knock'd on head in their mothers' arms — no horrid massacres — no exaggerations. (66)

Unlike the Whig Club, Fitzwilliam was able to separate his response to the events at Manchester from a demand for parliamentary reform, in favour of which (unlike his son) he was never convinced. His presence at a public meeting of such a character, however, was too much for the government and Lord Sidmouth wrote to the Prime Minister recommending Fitzwilliam's instant removal from his post as Lord Lieutenant of the West Riding: 'This was a necessary act of insulted authority', he wrote to the Lord Chancellor. Fitzwilliam was a representative of the King, yet in calling for a Peterloo inquiry he was not only arraigning the conduct of the King's ministers, but also flying in the face of the stated opinions of the Prince Regent. His dismissal caused indignation in Whig ranks and made Fitzwilliam an unlikely martyr in the reformers' campaign against the government. Marmaduke Wyvill, for example, resigned his commission in the York Hussars on account of Fitzwilliam's dismissal, describing the county of Yorkshire as 'at once locally insulted as well as nationally aggrieved', and a
correspondent of Sir Francis Lindley Wood, described the dismissal as 'a mark of pitiful malice' and 'a sample of the desperate violence with which ministers are determined to pursue their ruinous measures'. The earl was sent a deferential address from the York Whig Club praising him for his urbane manners, facility of access, and independent spirit, but most of all for joining his name with the popular cause:

And we trust your Lordship and other noble and powerful persons, observing the predominance of reforming principles, must see that it is by gratifying the people alone, that they can be conciliated. (70)

It did not matter that in his reply thanking the Club for their letter, Fitzwilliam stressed that he supported the prerogatives of the Crown and in general 'manifested a want of coincidence with one or more of the opinions expressed in their address', he could still be represented as an unfortunate victim of government repression. The Whig Club and Fitzwilliam held similar views over the Queen Caroline affair, described by Hazlitt as 'the only question I have ever known that excited a thorough popular feeling. It struck its roots into the heart of the nation; it took possession of every house or cottage in the Kingdom'. In June 1820 the York Whig Club handed a requisition to the Lord Mayor, signed by 589 people, for a meeting 'to consider the propriety of addressing her Majesty the Queen' and at the subsequent meeting 3,000 people heard speeches from Dunsley, Nicoll and Hargrove. By 1820 the Club was declared to be 'a great and powerful political body', and had maintained a high profile and level of activity for two years, yet there were signs later in this year that it was beginning to lose some of its former influence. It failed, for example, in its efforts to drum up support for a county meeting in support of Queen Caroline (largely a consequence of Fitzwilliam, by this time, disapproving of any such meetings). In February 1821 Samuel Nicoll did not only stand down at President of the Whig Club, to be replaced by Sir George Cayley, but he resigned from the membership altogether. It seems that he could stand the constant manoeuvring and compromising amongst reformers no longer, and despaired for the future. In December 1820, when the Club's committee had assembled to draw up an address, Nicholl's draft was rejected in favour of one produced by a radical joiner. From about this time, although there were to be isolated successes in the future, the Club was on a downwards curve.
Sir George Cayley, the second leader of the York Whig Club, was a remarkable man in many ways. He is best known for his pioneering aeronautical theories, leading one biographer to describe him as 'the inventor of the aeroplane'. He was also a thoroughly innovative landlord and initiated several measures on his estates at Brompton near Scarborough which contributed to the welfare of his tenants. In the realm of politics, Sir George's activities were less spectacular but nonetheless important. During the 1810's he was a constant supporter of parliamentary reform and was in regular correspondence with Christopher Wyvill. In 1811, for example, he circulated a printed plan of Parliamentary Reform amongst the leading gentlemen reformers of the county, calling for unity amongst the various classes of reformers and an association pledged to certain specific objects. A year later Cayley expressed the belief that 'a gradual, but firm and radical reform in the representation of the people is the only human method of preserving the state' and he regularly sought to stimulate united activity among reformers. In 1818 he wrote A Letter on the subject of Parliamentary Reform Addressed to Major Cartwright which was published in pamphlet form. Besides being President of the York Whig Club, he was also, for a time, President of York's Mechanics Institution, established in 1827, and he sat as a Whig Member of Parliament for Scarborough in the first reformed Parliament from 1832-34. But despite Cayley's accomplishments and impeccable credentials as a respectable supporter of moderate but effective parliamentary reform, the Whig Club went into decline during the time he was its President.

It would be unfair to assign a disproportionate amount of blame for the decline of the Whig Club to Cayley personally since there were several other factors involved, but it is fair to say that he was, in many respects, ill-equipped to lead the Club. He was more of a figurehead president than an active organizer like Nicoll. Brompton was over thirty miles from York and in Cayley's absence the Club passed increasingly into the hands of less socially elevated individuals. Moreover, he was no orator capable of inspiring members to action by his words — it was perhaps partly an awareness of his shortcomings in this respect which led him to be always away on the continent at the time of the Club's annual dinners. His model for parliamentary reform was that advocated by Concentric societies in other parts of the country. Such societies regarded
the salvation of the country as a common centre, but showed the various shades of opinion as to the means of effecting that object by the different dimensions of the circle surrounding it. Cayley recognized that he was 'an old fashioned man', out of the mainstream of reformers and described himself as 'as firm a defender of the crown and the aristocracy in their proper spheres as I am a determined enemy to all encroachments upon commoners'. He retained a belief that all men of good faith, and at least some reforming inclinations, should be able to reach a happy compromise. For example, he wrote in March 1821 to Lord Milton, who until very recently had not admitted the necessity for any modification of parliamentary representation but now felt that the House of Commons should more closely represent the will of the nation,'... I think there is little doubt there exists some middle point at which we, as genuine friends of reform, may unite...'. For a time reformers had managed to unite in 1819-20; the crises of these years seemed to face the political nation with the alternatives of increasing social disorder or Parliamentary Reform, and were enough to persuade discerning men like Francis Jeffrey, who did not believe in the theoretical merits of reform, to accept the latter, simply 'to conciliate and convince the people'. No doubt many moderate reformers joined the York Whig Club and avowed themselves supporters of its principles for similar reasons. As the 1820's progressed, however, moderate reformers went one way and radicals the other, leaving the York Whig Club as a deserted and impotent pig in the middle.

Cayley was very conscious that 'Government will treat the mob reformers, unbacked by the wealth of the county, with no respect'. He expressed a confident hope in February 1821 that the many respectable country gentlemen who had lately joined the Club would ultimately be the means of extending the establishment to the county at large. The Herald added that 'it is not perhaps generally known that amongst the members of the club there are already from 30 to 40 gentlemen of the first respectability in the county'. Cayley made a similar point in a letter read out to the annual dinner in December 1821 — if gentlemen from the county could be persuaded to join, the Club would provide a 'central rallying point' for all reformers. In fact, Cayley's thinking appears to have been more concerned with the county than the Whig Club membership. He wrote four long letters to Lord Milton between March and September 1821.
discussing the merits of a county meeting (for which he was prepared to return early from a trip to Paris) without ever mentioning the Whig Club, as if he was shamefaced about his connection with the Club. 87 A strategy of winning over opinion in the county was not necessarily a bad idea in the context of the early 1820's—a time of agricultural difficulties as a result of two poor harvests and consequent rural distress. If parliamentary reform could secure support from large county meetings it would be well on its way to respectability and acceptance. There were a series of county meetings in 1821-23 to petition for the relief of the agricultural interest, including a meeting in Yorkshire in January 1823, and historians have noted the importance of this period in finally persuading many members of the liberal middle classes of the necessity of reform, but the York Whig Club remained divorced from such activity. The Club was not able to establish a strong foothold in the County of Yorkshire and Colonel Cooke was referring to gentry reformers when he commented bitterly at the dinner in November 1822 that 'the Yorkshire Reformers, some of them at least, supported the principles of reform in the morning, and deserted its friends in the evening'. 88 The reforming resolve of Yorkshire country gentlemen regularly wavered at times of popular agitation. This had been seen, for example, a decade earlier when support faded away for Cayley's plan of Parliamentary Reform. Sir Francis Wood, having greeted the original proposals for association as 'excellent', eighteen months later wrote that, 'the dread of going beyond all reasonable limits has prevented many who wish well to the cause from giving it their aid'. He was only prepared to join an association for Parliamentary Reform pledged to very mild, specific objects, and added in a letter to Cayley, 'I do not like upon this subject any appeal ad populum'. 89 The difficulties which the reform question raised for Yorkshire reformers also became apparent during discussions in December 1820 as to the viability of holding a county meeting to draw attention to the rural distress. Such a meeting would be likely to exacerbate political and social divisions over the question of reform, and yet inaction might be equally dangerous and divisive. W.B. Cooke described the quandary thus: "...the great people want a county meeting with no mention of reform; the little people will have no meeting in which reform is not to be brought forward, and hence no meeting at present will be attended at the same time fully and respectably'. 90 No meeting was
held at this time. For a short time the York Whig Club succeeded in being a 'county' and a 'city' organisation. The temporary fusion of interests was assisted by York's status as an administrative and social centre within the county. The county assizes, York races, the Assembly Rooms, the markets and shops and the city's position at the centre of a system of roads, meant that in the early nineteenth century York continued to be as Daniel Defoe put it in 1724 a centre for 'the confluence of the gentry', although contemporary historians were certain that the city's status was diminished and detected an underlying economic malaise. The distinction between county and city was also blurred by the fact that the city staged the nomination and polling for the county elections, and county meetings were held in the Castle Yard. It seems, however, that gentry reformers were withdrawing their support from the York Whig Club in 1822 — with a consequent lowering of the club's social profile.

The membership of the York Whig Club became progressively less respectable — By October 1822, according to the unsympathetic Gazette, the Club consisted 'chiefly of journeymen, mechanics and other freemen of the lower orders in the city of York'. As if embarrassed by the social status of its membership, the Club became increasingly secretive — at a meeting in March 1822, for example, the doors were closed against all non-members and the details of proceedings, the contents, proposers and seconders of resolutions, and the identity of the chairman were not revealed. The name of Sir George Cayley was emblazoned at the head of placards calling meetings of the Club in order to maintain the aura of respectability, but he attended very rarely. Instead of all reformers sheltering under one umbrella, splinter groups and separate societies were established both at artisan and gentry levels. In August 1822 Walter Fawkes established a reform committee which excluded every person under the rank of gentleman and summoned a meeting which was attended by about 300 people. The Gazette was predictably dismissive of the meeting — 'Not twenty gentlemen of any note or consideration in this great county, attended, though the meeting was fixed in the middle of Race Week, for the express purpose of ensuring a numerous assemblage'. But it rejoiced in the thought that the committee would supersede the Whig Club — 'most certainly it is better to have a faction of gentlemen, than of cobblers and artisans'. Among the labouring classes, too, the Whig Club faced competition in the period 1822-25 from the establishment
of a York branch of the Great Northern Union and the York Reformers Union.94

Cayley also failed in his efforts to reduce the high levels of bribery common at York elections. At the victory dinner of the two Whig candidates after the expensive election of 1820, he proposed the formation of a Purity of Election Society to agitate for the return of members without bribes.95 Cayley was not the first person to intimate that York should put its own house in order before trying to advise other places as to the best mode of parliamentary reform. In February 1817 Martin Stapylton asserted that at elections in York upwards of 1,200 electors received from the friends of either or both candidates a bribe of a guinea. This worked out at 3s. a year over seven years — 'a very inadequate compensation for the guilt of the sacrifice, and for the loss of the freeman's best birthright'.96 But freemen continued to expect to be rewarded for their votes — at a meeting of the 'Friends of Colonel Cooke' in July 1819 it was reckoned that £4,000 was needed to ensure his success, and the radical Edmund Gill, a member of the Political Protestants, commented that 'there was no going to war without money; for under existing circumstances the poor freemen must be remunerated for their loss of time'.97 It was easy, of course, to ridicule Gill's justification for the freemen being remunerated; many of them did extremely well out of being employed at elections as 'messengers', canvassers, or chair bearers, whilst others consumed copious amounts of food and drink, but his general point could not be disputed. Bribery continued to be rife at York elections into the 1830's, as was demonstrated by evidence given to the Select Committee on the York City Election Bribery petition in 1835. Many of the voters genuinely needed the money that contested elections inevitably brought to the city. R.H. Anderson gave evidence that 1,200 of the freemen of York were very poor and were employed as 'labourers and porters and everything in the lower order of trade', and a veteran freeman and participant in many elections informed the committee that he regularly used his election money to redeem his belongings from the pawn shop.98 Cayley's worthy idealism made it difficult for him to understand the stark monetary realities of York politics.

After 1822, the York Whig Club discontinued the practice of holding annual dinners. The gatherings of 1820 and 1821 had proved a great success, giving the club a high local and national profile, but it would have proved counter productive to bring members to-
gether only for the proceedings to be ridiculed, when they were such consciously public events. J.G. Lambton, M.P. for the county of Durham and the leading light of the radical wing of the Whig party, had been the main speaker at the dinners of September 1820 and December 1821, held at the city's assembly rooms. The first dinner was attended by over 400 people and the Herald gushed that 'never in the memory of man, was there a more orderly and respectable meeting — never was there, in so numerous a party, such an enthusiastic and general expression of liberal sentiment'.

A similar number of guests attended the dinner in December 1821 which received significant coverage in the national press. Lambton cited the withdrawal of the Bill against the Queen—'The voice of the people had on that occasion been exerted with success', and remarked that it was in the same spiteful spirit in which the government had persecuted the Queen that it had dismissed General Sir Robert Wilson from his commission in the army. He referred to the House of Commons' dismissal of his plan for parliamentary reform earlier in the year and commented that if Parliament was to be reformed 'it could only be by the power and operation of public opinion acting, he might almost say on the fears of that assembly'.

In 1821 Lambton shared his star billing with Lord Normanby, the son of a cabinet minister, Lord Mulgrave, and a Tory convert. It was a notable coup for the Whig Club to attract such support and Normanby 'pledged himself to further as far as lay in his power, the objects, and maintain the principles of that association'. The Times intoned in an editorial that: 'It is most gratifying to see persons of his Lordship's rank maintain the principles of freedom; because, while they prevent those opinions which they advocate from running into excess, they ensure their ultimate triumph'.

The toasts that were drunk at Whig dinners such as these were always subject to a great deal of scrutiny from hostile press critics on both sides of the political spectrum, and they provide a useful barometer of Whig sentiments on certain issues and the standing of particular individuals. In 1820, for example, Lambton proposed the health of Lord Fitzwilliam and it was drunk most enthusiastically, whereas by December 1821 the toast to Lord Dundas was greeted with groans and hisses, Fitzwilliam's health was only given right at the end of the dinner almost as an afterthought, and the health of Lord Milton, the Whig representative for the county, was not given at all. At the dinner in November 1822 the Gazette
was shocked that the toast to 'the constitution as established in 1688' preceded that of 'The King' and both were drunk in profound silence, whereas 'The Majesty of the people' was honoured with three times three and cheers. Conversely, the radical Black Dwarf had been disappointed in 1821 that the toast of the 'Sovereignty of the People' was omitted, especially since in its view, at York 'The Whigs are in some better repute than ordinary Whigs'. It noted that Lambton had admired the sovereignty of the people in other countries such as Italy, Spain, Portugal and Greece, but the paper implied that Whigs were a good deal more cautious where Britain was concerned. The editor asked pertinently: 'Are these any thing but words? any thing, but air and vapours? Do these gentlemen really wish the people to endeavour to obtain Reform; or are they only anxious to obtain a reputation for patriotism, by tavern speeches and dinner bravery?'

This, of course, was a key question and one suspects that there was an element of the later motivation behind Lambton's radical posturing. It has been shown that, by 1822, the Club was declining in influence but the committee entertained hopes that its fortunes might be revived if the liberal Duke of Sussex, the king's brother, could be prevailed upon to preside at their dinner when he came up to York to attend the Races in August. They tendered an invitation to him to this end, and the possibility of his accepting was not as unlikely as it might sound since the Duke had presided, for example, at the Norfolk Fox Dinner in 1820. But with the Whig aristocracy and gentry by this time openly shunning the Whig Club, not surprisingly the invitation was declined. If one is to believe the Gazette the coffers of the Club were at a low ebb and were utterly incapable of furnishing an entertainment fit for a Prince to partake of. The dinner was postponed until November and when it took place was denuded of its star speakers and attended by only two or three hundred people. After Lambton had cried off, Sir Francis Burdett had promised to be present, but never arrived on account of an alleged riding accident. Walter Fawkes' Committee, Lord Milton and several leading Whig gentlemen disdained to honour the Club with their presence although they were in York at the time of the dinner. This was the virtual end of the Whig Club as a legitimate force in York, let alone county or national politics. Apart from its brief re-activation at the General Elections of 1826 and 1830 the Whig Club's last significant action was to issue a petition for reform in February 1823. In addition to
the usual demands for economic redress and parliamentary reform it recommended other detailed radical proposals such as the total repeal of assessed taxes, the abolition of all sinecured offices, places and pensions, the sale of crown lands, and a reduction of the revenues of the Church of England in order to help reduce the National Debt. 109

It is almost impossible to know the total number of members of the York Whig Club at any one time — the only figure that exists is of 800 members in May 1822 and one cannot know how this compares with figures for the earlier history of the club or its decline after this date. 110 Whatever the case, by February 1823 the Club's proclamations carried no weight and there are no reports of Whig Club activity in subsequent years in the local press other than those relating to the elections. One should add, in fairness to York Whigs, that the causes for the decline were predominantly national rather than local: after 1823 economic distress was reduced and discussion of reform became infrequent. As one Whig magnate observed, 'the prosperity of the country has driven reform almost out of the heads of the reformers'. 111 The few Whig Clubs that did survive beyond 1823 had problems in maintaining their identity and objectives in the face of the so-called 'liberal toryism' associated with Canning and Huskisson, which proved to be much more acceptable to the influential middling ranks of the people that the repressive government policies of 1817-20. (There were active county Whig Clubs in Devon, Essex, Gloucestershire and Cheshire, and there may have been a few elsewhere. The latter two limped rather incoherently into the mid 1820's.) It was scant consolation to many Whigs to congratulate themselves upon being a perpetually watchful opposition, or to insist that it had only been their continued perseverance that had won over public opinion and brought about welcome changes in the government's commercial and foreign policies. 112

Even when the York Whig Club was revived at the two subsequent elections, it failed in its professed aim 'to secure the return of two Whig representatives for the city of York'. 113 In-fighting between squabbling liberal factions on both occasions let in a Tory-sponsored candidate — respectively Colonel Wilson and Samuel Bayntun. In 1826 Marmaduke Wyvill and Thomas Dundas fell out as their respective committees wrangled over tactics and disagreed over who should pay the costs for transporting outvoters to York. A coalition was not persisted in and Dundas retired before the contest.
The Herald reported thus:

Various rumours were afloat — some blamed the corporation — some the Whig Club — we know that neither of them, as a body, was to blame, although a lukewarmness or apparent jealousy between the two certainly has ever been evident and is much to be lamented. (114)

Antagonism between the Corporation and the Whig Club was also apparent in 1830 when Thomas Dundas was again a candidate, and Edward Petre was the favoured representative of the Whig Club. Petre's supporters seemed to blame the Dundas committee for Petre's defeat, because it declined to tell its supporters to split their votes until Dundas was safe. This belief presumably explains the hostile reference to the corporation as 'a self-elected and self-electing body for two centuries' in a Petre sponsored pollbook, despite the fact that Petre was Lord Mayor at the time! A toast was drunk to the Whig Club at the public dinner in honour of Petre in September 1830 but it must have been around this time at the club dissolved itself. In November 1830 a letter from R.M. Beverley to the editor of the Herald proposed that 'A Reform Association should be formed at York, without either the objectionable name, or confined and local views of the extinct Whig Club'.

Lord Anson, at a Cheshire Whig Club dinner in 1820 noted that:

There has been a want of spirit on the part of the Whigs in not taking their constitutional stand among the people in the provinces, where their estates, and the influence and patriotism of superior character, give them a powerful ascendancy. (117)

This was the nub of the problem for reformers. Clubs and pressure groups in the provinces, activated and organized by reform minded individuals from the middle classes, could pick up the baton of reform and wave it enthusiastically in the air, but they needed the support of the more influential landowning Whig magnates if they were to run with it. The Whigs liked to envisage themselves as supporters of the rights of the people, and contemporary Whig historians like Lord John Russell and Henry Hallam depicted them as leaders of the popular party and reformers, but they had achieved very little in the recent past to sustain such a view of themselves. From their previous brief ministry of 1806-07 the Whigs could point to the abolition of the slave trade but very little else. Some of 'the people' who leading Whigs eulogized in their speeches were justifiably suspicious of the party's reforming intentions. They feared that, as Cayley put it, 'the Whig party only wish
to make a tool of the people to get their own party into power and
ultimately to leave efficient reform in the lurch', or that they would
disfranchise the most corrupt rotten boroughs in a half-hearted,
piecemeal fashion. There is evidence that the very name 'Whig'
was a handicap in the development of the York Whig Club, and it is
possible that this was the main reason Whig Clubs did not prolif-
erate throughout the country — the taint of 'party' was too strong.
For example, the Tyne Mercury, commenting on the York Whig Club
dinner of December 1821, noted a reference by Cayley to 'the fearful
and oppressive quality in the present silence of the country',
which he believed arose from a 'sullen' attitude on the part of the
people. The paper's response was to point out that the people had
hardly been sullen and silent over Peterloo and Queen Caroline and
to ask with pretended innocence, if the Whigs had attempted meetings
in which the people would not join in. 'Why do they talk as if the
people have lost all spirit and independence, and they are the sole
props of an expiring constitution?' 121 'Delta', in a letter to the
Herald in November 1822, argued that the name of Whig had already
sunk so much in public estimation that the Whig Club should be done
away with altogether and redesignated the York Reform Club. He
described the title of Whig as 'stale and spiritless', whilst that
of reformer was 'fresh and inspiring' — 'we should then know with
whom we associated and for what...as the title of Whig does not
necessarily embrace the principles of reform, while that of Reform
includes all that is valuable in Whiggism'. 122 When Sir George
Cayley finally tendered his resignation as President of the Club
in October 1827 he made a similar point—it was a time to end party
distinctions; the York Tory Club no longer existed and he recom-
mended that the Whig Club re-model itself, 'under such a title and
regulations as will admit all persons who are honest supports of
civil and religious liberty, cordially to unite under its banners'. 123
The York Whig Club had been one of the strongest and most active
provincial societies of its time, but on its own it could achieve
little. The country had to wait until 1831-32 for Whig party
leaders to take up the baton of reform.
FOOTNOTES:


3. B.L. Add MSS 51531, (Holland House MSS), 51686 Grenville to Holland 10 Jan. 1813; Lansdowne to Holland 10 Jan.1813.


8. Sheffield City Library, Wentwork Woodhouse MSS, Robert Chalenor to Fitzwilliam 9 June 1818 (F48/138); Fitzwilliam to Lord Milton 11 June 1818 (G1/6). I am grateful to the Director of Libraries and Information Services at Sheffield and to Olive, Countess Fitzwilliam's Wentworth Settlement Trustees for permission to use these papers.

9. York Courant 22 June 1818; Scrapiana Yorkshire at York Minster Library. Add. Ms 278 (Collection of Tory handbills). Dundas and Cooke did, however, issue joint canvassing cards and agree to share the cost of transporting and entertaining non-resident freemen. The potentially damaging charge of coalition carried some credibility after the decision of London freemen to support them jointly. (Westworth Woodhouse MSS, Robert Chalenor to Fitzwilliam 26 June 1818 (F48/146); Charles M. Wentworth to Fitzwilliam 21 June 1818 (F48/144).

10. Wentworth Woodhouse MSS, W.B. Cooke to Fitzwilliam 27 June 1818 (F48/147).

11. Ibid., Robert Chalenor to Fitzwilliam 26 June 1818 (F48/146).

12. Resolutions passed at a meeting held at Etridge's Hotel, 18 Sept. 1818 for the formation of the York Whig Club (York,1820) [York Central Library].


20. Yorkshire Gazette 15 Dec. 1821. A week later the figure of 9 was reduced to 7.

21. Ibid., 8 Dec. 1821.

22. R. H. Skaife, 'Civic officials and Parliamentary Representatives in York' (MS in York City Archives) vol. 1, p. 198; E. A. Smith, Whig Principles and Party Politics: Earl Fitzwilliam and the Whig party 1748-1833 (Manchester, 1979) p. 283; Two of Dundas' sons, Thomas and John Charles were also to represent York in Parliament in the 1830's, whilst Robert Chalenor, who was married to Lawrence Dundas's sister, was York's M. P. from June 1820 until 1826.


29. Ibid., 14 Nov. 1818.

30. Ibid., 16 Jan. 1819.

31. Ibid., 8 Jan. 1820.

32. North Yorkshire County Record Office Wyvill MSS, S. W. Nicoll to Wyvill 10 Feb. 1819.


34. Cf. J. R. Dinwiddy, Christopher Wyvill and Reform 1790-1820 (York, 1971) pp. 28-29; Wentworth Woodhouse MSS, W. Tottie to Fitzwilliam
1 March 1817 (F83/15). This letter, from Fitzwilliam's agent in Leeds, adverts to the impracticability of parliamentary reform given the shaky state of affairs in Yorkshire.

35. York Herald 17 April 1819.

36. Pigot and Co., Directory of Yorkshire (1829) I p.132. York's ratio of shops to population in 1822 at 1:55 was exceptionally high.

37. A. Armstrong, Stability and Change in an English County Town: a social study of York 1801-51 (Cambridge, 1974) pp.28-30. When the establishment of a Mechanics' Institute was suggested in 1827, a newspaper correspondent complained: 'We have no manufacturers, we have no complicated machinery in operation; we have no weavers, no dyers, no shipbuilders, no mines'. (York Herald 26 May 1827).

38. York Herald 3 July 1819.


41. York Herald 8 April, 10 June, 17 June 1820.

42. Ibid., 18 April 1819.

43. Ibid., 3 July 1819. In fact, due to worries over his health and over the expense involved, Cooke declined to stand.

44. Yorkshire Gazette 16 Oct. 1819.

45. Wentworth Woodhouse MSS. Extract from Mr. Nicoll's letter to Mr. Robson of Doncaster (F48/150), copy W.B. Cooke to S.W. Nicoll 18 Sept. 1819 (F48/151).


49. Ibid., pp.5-6.

50. S.W.Nicoll, A Second Letter to the members of the York Whig Club, including a general view of Parliamentary Reform (1819)p.11 et seq.

51. York Herald 8 Jan. 1820. The declaration received the significant stamp of approval of the influential Leeds Mercury, of which Edward Baines was the editor. The detailed proposals were described as 'well worth the attention of the country'. It was 'an experiment of the Radical system—if its effects were found beneficial it might be extended, if detrimental the mischief would not be beyond remedy'. (Leeds Mercury 8 Jan. 1820).
53. Ibid., 22 Jan. 1820.
56. Wentworth Woodhouse MSS, Robert Chalenor to Fitzwilliam 25 March 1820 (F48/152).
57. Yorkshire Gazette 4 March 1820.
58. Wentworth Woodhouse MSS, Robert Chalenor to Fitzwilliam 25 March 1820 (F48/152).
59. The final number of votes polled was Dundas 1,647, Wyvill 1,527, Howden 1,201.
60. York Herald 11 March 1820. Wyvill's promise to advocate reform was tortuously phrased. He pledged to support 'not what was called a Radical Reform, though the term, Radical was certainly misapplied, for he did in reality want a Radical Reform, not to overthrow the constitution but to repair it, to defend it, and to keep it in good order' (Leeds Mercury 11 March 1820).
61. e.g. Parliamentary Debates (2nd series) vol. 4, 31 Jan. 1821 cols. 222-223; vol. 5, 18 April 1821 col. 216.
62. H. Jephson, The Platform (London, 1892) I pp. 493-495 provides an account of this meeting. A list of the many other reform meetings in Yorkshire during the summer of 1819 is given in J. Mayhall, Annals of Yorkshire, from the Earliest Period to the Present Time (Leeds, 1874) 1, p. 280. The best analysis of the events at St. Peter's Field on 16 August 1819 is provided by D. Read, Peterloo: The 'Massacre' and its Background (Manchester, 1958).
63. The Times 23 Sept. 1819.
65. Grey MSS, Fitzwilliam to Grey 10 October 1819, 'I have some little proof that the mass desire no better than to be directed by us.'
66. B.L. Add. MS 51593, Fitzwilliam to Lord Holland, 18 Sept. 1819.
69. Rev. L.T. Bergner: A Warning Letter to the Prince Regent intended principally as a call upon the middle ranks at this important crisis (London, 1819) p.12; Hickleton MSS, A4/10

70. Wentworth Woodhouse MSS, S.W. Nicoll to Fitzwilliam 15 Nov, 1819 (F127/144(1)).


74. York Herald 17 June, 24 June 1820.

75. The Poll for members in parliament to represent the City of York. (Printed for the Election Committee of the Hon. Edward Petre, 1832) p.iii.


77. Yorkshire Gazette 2 Dec. 1820.


80. The Times 18 Dec. 1857 (Obituary); Hickleton MSS, A4 19/1, Printed Plan of Parliamentary Reform, and Cayley to W.Fawkes 14 Nov. 1812 (copy).


84. Wyvill MSS, Cayley to Wyvill 4 Feb. 1817.


86. Ibid.


88. Yorkshire Gazette 9 Nov. 1822.

89. Hickleton MSS, A4/19/1 Cf. Wood's handwritten amendments to Printed Plan of Parliamentary Reform; Wood to Cayley 16 Nov.1812.
90. Fitzwilliam MSS, W.B.Cooke to Fitzwilliam 3 Dec. 1820.

91. Ibid., 26 Oct. 1822.

92. e.g. Ibid., 6 Oct. 1821, 30 March 1822.

93. Ibid., 24 Aug. 1822.


95. The Poll Book for 1820 (printed and published by T. Sotheran) p. xi.


97. Ibid., 10 July 1819.

98. Report from the Select Committee on York City Election bribery petition together with the minutes of evidence and an appendix (H.M.S.O., 1835) 1, pp. 489-490.


100. The Times 7 Dec. 1821. Marmaduke Wyvill spoke eloquently of the Club's successes: 'He did not look at it as important in a merely local view, but he considered it to be of great general advantage... it behoved the people to take such means as would effectually secure their liberties; and he thought they could adopt no better mode to frustrate the designs of their enemies, than by establishing associations similar to the York Whig Club'.

101. This was a subject uppermost in Lambton's mind, since he had been staying with his father-in-law, Lord Grey, at Howick in the company of Sir Robert, and the following week was to accompany him to Paris. For Wilson's radical credentials and the background to his dismissal, cf. M. Glover, A Very Slippery Fellow: The Life of Sir Robert Wilson, 1777-1849 (Oxford, 1978).

102. The Times 7 Dec. 1821.

103. Ibid., S. Maccoby, English Radicalism 1786-1832 (London, 1955) pp. 380-381. Sir Constantine Henry Phipps, first Marquess of Normanby and second Earl of Mulgrave (1797-1863), was in Lord Melbourne's cabinet in the late 1830's and was subsequently the British ambassador in Paris.

104. Yorkshire Gazette 22 Dec. 1821.

105. Ibid., 9 Nov. 1822.

106. Quoted in Ibid., 29 Dec. 1821.


108. Ibid., 9 Nov. 1822.


113. **York Herald** 18 March 1826.


115. *The Poll for members in parliament...1832* (Printed by Petre's election committee)p.iii et.seq.

116. **York Herald** 27 Nov. 1830.


122. Quoted in *Yorkshire Gazette* 30 Nov. 1830.

123. *York Courant* 2 Oct. 1827.
"We remember that Mr. Burke was ousted from Bristol for resisting the American War; that Mr. Protheroe lost his seat last year for advocating the cause of West Indian slaves; that Sir Charles Wetherell was elected Recorder of the city on account of his principles; that hitherto Bristol has been one of the most backward cities of the whole empire..."

(Brighton Guardian, 4 May, 1831).

In the aftermath of the Bristol Riots of October 1831, W.H. Somerton, editor of the Bristol Mercury wrote that:

"In no part of this country has the exclusive system more strongly developed itself than in the city of Bristol... To be wealthy and a Tory is to be one of the elect by divine right, to be wealthy and a Whig is to be one of the elect by courtesy". (1)

The national reputation of the city in the early nineteenth century was as a stronghold of slavery and a bastion of Tory principles. There was a marked overlap in membership between the Tory Corporation and other local government or civic institutions such as the Corporation of the poor, the Docks Company, Paving Commissioners, Merchant Venturers and Select Vestries. The Corporation maintained a formidable alliance with the Established Church, and the Tory interest possessed an extremely effective electoral organization, which exerted itself through the West Indian interest and the Select Vestries. 15-20,000 people attended a meeting in Bristol to oppose Catholic Emancipation in February 1828 whilst advocates for liberal measures were unable to get a hearing. It was the only city to send up to Parliament an anti-reform petition of any substance (in January 1831) and the only borough, in the wake of local elections following the Municipal Corporations Bill of 1835, where liberal principles did not sweep the board. At the first reformed election of December 1832 Bristol elected the ultra-Tory Cornishman Sir Richard Vyvyan. Thus, in contrast to the position at Newcastle and York, where reformers could point to a degree of success in articulating a series of progressive requests for change, in Bristol the task is to explain the failure and weakness of the liberal middle classes. Bristol was not at the forefront of hostility to the 1815 Corn Law and the harsh government legislation of 1816-19, nor in the campaigns for parliamentary reform or the "Peoples' Charter" in the later 1830's. Nevertheless she could not dissociate
herself from prevailing national experiences and preoccupations. At various times the city was subjected to the attentions of some of the most notable political campaigners of the era - Hunt, Cobbett and Cartwright. Their efforts may have contributed to the creation of the lively radical sub-culture, which undoubtedly existed at Bristol, but in terms of practical results their promptings produced a very muted response. The aim of this chapter is thus two-fold: to draw attention to, and describe, the efforts of Bristolians to advance reform causes, and to discover why the city was comparatively backward in its reform endeavours.

Newcastle had its Fox dinners but political dinners to celebrate the memory and principles of Charles James Fox occurred only briefly in Bristol, between 1813 and 1815. The inaugural gathering in January 1813, chaired by J.H. Wilcox, was described by the Bristol Gazette as "very respectable and numerous". The main speaker, Charles Elton, congratulated the city on instituting an anniversary dinner and considered it "as establishing a rallying point for the friends of freedom, and as opening an arena for the expression of free opinions". The following year the Gazette was again able to describe the dinner in a positive way — "notwithstanding the inclemency of the weather, a larger party attended than last year... never did we witness a public dinner where greater harmony and conviviality prevailed". By 1815, however, the hostile Bristol Journal reported that "the company was certainly more select than numerous". Prudently, the Gazette chose not to record the annual proceedings at the Bush Tavern in 1816 when it was said that a total of eight people had dined, attended upon by fourteen waiters. Not surprisingly no further dinner was attempted — a lapse that was gleefully observed in the Tory press in later years. The harsh reality was that very few people rallied to the whig cause in Bristol in these years, in the way that instigators of the Fox dinners had hoped for. The failure of the dinners raises a number of questions related to the nature and political weakness of the liberal elite and middle classes in the city.

Evidence of one reason for the failure of the dinners was seen in the murmurs of disapproval which greeted a toast to the "Members of the City of Bristol" at the first gathering in January 1813, which contrasted with the great enthusiasm elicited by the proposed toast to "Sir Samuel Romilly and the Law of England".
Sir Henry Protheroe noted the hissing, and observed that "although his brother's votes in Parliament might not on every occasion accord with the sentiments of the meeting, he knew that it was his desire to serve them all..." Three months earlier, in October 1812, Sir Edward Protheroe, who described himself as a constitutional whig, had defeated the imported, progressive whig candidate, Sir Samuel Romilly. The whig division obviously persisted, and what was described as a "serious altercation" took place at the 1813 dinner between Sir Henry Protheroe and James Mills, editor of the Gazette. The following year some of the bridges had been mended. Elton referred to past misunderstandings and animosities but, in conciliatory fashion, noted with approval Protheroe's intention to support "a fair constitutional reform" of the House of Commons, and his defence of Samuel Whitbread. Sir Henry Protheroe expressed the hope that past differences were now buried and forgotten. Subsequent events showed clearly that they were not. The Journal poured scorn on a report mentioning the harmony that had prevailed at the 1815 dinner. The pitiful number that attended in 1815 and 1816 was probably not unrelated to disappointment engendered by several of Sir Edward Protheroe's votes in the House of Commons, and the prominent role of his brother in organizing the dinners. Sir Henry Protheroe chaired the gathering of eight in 1816.

The lines along which Bristol whigs and reformers had split in 1812 and the issues involved, represented the fault line of Bristol politics for at least the next twenty years, thus the General Election of 1812 and the events leading up to it are worthy of more detailed investigation. In the same year, more by accident than design, the whig majority on Bristol's corporation was overturned, leading to Tory domination of the city's municipal affairs which was to last for the rest of the century. This alteration in the local balance of political power was symptomatic of the social, religious, and political stresses within the whig camp in Bristol.

The 1812 Bristol election has been examined by previous historians in a variety of different contexts. It was in Bristol that 'Orator' Henry Hunt pioneered the use of the mass platform as an agitational device, and the events of 1812 have been distilled and analysed from his point of view (Hunt was a candidate not only at the General Election in October 1812, but also at a bitterly fought by-election in Bristol, which had taken place only three months earlier). The elements of election ritual and the large number of
popular gatherings to which elections gave rise, have been studied by a historian of crowd behaviour, focussing upon the Bristol election of 1812 as a case-study, and the contest has also been analysed as a formative influence in the political thinking of the London Shipwright (but former Bristolian) John Gast. Sir Samuel Romilly and Hunt, moreover, both included detailed accounts of the election in their respective memoirs. Many whig eyes throughout the country were focussed upon Bristol in 1812; it was a high profile contest often referred to in private correspondence, although pride of place in newspaper reportage and private discussion, went to the contest at Liverpool where the candidates included Henry Brougham, following his successful campaign against a renewal of the Orders-in-Council, and George Canning. The cities of Bristol and Liverpool were regularly bracketed together in the early nineteenth century - Liverpool tended to be the yardstick by which Bristol's relative economic decline was measured. During the mid 1820's the Bristol press published weekly comparisons of prices, dock duties and trade statistics, in the two ports.

Romilly possessed an impeccable reforming reputation and was a successful parliamentarian respected by 'Mountain' and moderate whigs alike. Early in 1812 a fund launched in London by Lord Folkestone, and managed by men such as Sir Francis Baring and Samuel Whitbread, raised £8,000 to support the election of Romilly at Bristol. To a critical William Cobbett it proved that:

"Sir Samuel Romilly does not put his trust in the free goodwill of the people of Bristol - the attempt, like many others that have been made before is purse against purse."

In his Political Register, Cobbett described the constituency, in characteristic style, as "the sport of two artful factions, who have divided between them the profits arising from the obtaining of your votes". It was his opinion that Whigs and Tories had a common interest in perpetuating sinecure places and getting as large a share as possible of public money. Cobbett provided a one-sided view of events and several months later admitted that his support of Hunt - and criticism of Romilly - had "brought upon him a torrent of abuse from various quarters". Romilly subsequently argued that the subscription to defray his expenses was organized without his consent by Westminster Whigs. Lord Grenville, who succeeded the Duke of Portland as High Steward of Bristol from July
1810, was in receipt of letters from both factions of the Bristol
whig interest in 1811/12. This previously unnoticed correspond-
ence, whilst not substantially altering the existing interpreta-
tion of events, allows additional insights into the back-stairs
manoeuvring and attempted currying of favour which was going on
behind the scenes in the selection of a whig candidate. They also
highlight the way in which allegiances in Bristol became split
between Romilly, an outsider from London, a progressive whig, and
a lawyer, and Edward Protheroe, common-councillor, from a well-
established Bristol family and self-confessedly an "old Whig", who
saw Romilly's 'democratical' principles as almost revolutionary.11

Bristol was represented in parliament between 1790 and 1812
by a coalition formed between the local leaders of the two con-
tending parties in order to avoid the expense of contested parlia-
mentary elections. One of Bristol's M.P.s voted regularly with the
administration, the other usually with the opposition. Political
clubs such as the Tory Stedfast Society, which had existed since
1737, and the Independent Constitutional Club, established by local
whigs in 1802, organized the candidature, campaigns, and finances
of elections in the early nineteenth century. In the jaundiced
view of the contemporary political observer T.H.B. Oldfield, "six
thousand persons to whom the right of election is supposed to be
confined, have virtually no representation at all". Romilly, too,
was critical of the system which prevailed at Bristol and noted in
his final speech following the close of the poll in October 1812:

"...upon all great and momentous questions such as
peace and war - an inquiry into the conduct of Ministers -
an investigation into political abuses - parliamentary
reform - or any important alteration in the Constitution,
this great city was at once to say Yes and No... it was
to avoid doing wrong, by taking care never to do what
was right; and was, in effect, to strike Bristol out of
the popular representation..." (12)

An aristocracy of birth in Bristol was conspicuous by its
absence - the chief ground landlord in Bristol was not a great
aristocrat, as in many other cities at this time, but the Merchant
Venturers Society. In electoral and political terms, Bristol was
independent from aristocratic control or influence. This meant
that the liberal middle classes lacked a figure such as Lambton or
Fitzwilliam from whom they could take a lead; often it will be
seen that Bristol whigs and reformers sought reassurance that they
were responding in the 'correct' manner on national issues. It was an uncoerced and even unconscious deference which led them, for example, to latch on to the Berkeley family so enthusiastically in the late 1830's and to treat Lord John Russell with such reverence when he visited the city in November 1835.\footnote{13} At least part of the reason that Bristol reformers lacked coherence and unity in the early nineteenth century was an absence of authoritative and firm leadership from above. The Duke of Norfolk and Lord Grenville had connections with the city and demonstrated an interest in its affairs, but if the 'old whig' leaders of Bristol's corporation had hoped that these men might provide aristocratic leadership they were to be disappointed. (The Duke was presented with the freedom of the city by the corporation in 1803 and was present when Lord Grenville received the same honour in May 1811 when both men also attended a banquet given by the Independent and Constitutional Club.\footnote{14} In July 1811, as soon as it became clear that the Whig Club at Bristol would be seeking a new candidate for any future general election, James Abercromby informed Grenville of an active canvass of electors that had commenced on behalf of Romilly at Bristol, and added, "...I thought it proper on account of your personal connection with Bristol as well as on other grounds to make this known to you...". Romilly was proposed as a possible candidate by the same people who had supported Grenville's election as High Steward. In a letter of 23 August 1811, Grenville wrote a letter of support to Romilly, noting that he had communicated on the subject with the Duke of Norfolk, "in concert with whom I have acted in all that regarded Bristol". He pledged "whatever feeble assistance can be derived from the expression of my best wishes for your success", and arranged a meeting so as to explain all he knew about Bristol and its interests.\footnote{15} Grenville continued to be informed of developments in Bristol until the confirmation of Romilly's selection as the official candidate of the Whig Club in January 1812, and had further discussions relating to Bristol's affairs with the Duke of Norfolk when they were together in a carriage on their way to Herefordshire in December 1811.\footnote{16} In fact, the events of 1811/12 showed both to be distant, albeit distinguished, players on the Bristol stage, and, although under pressure to do so, Grenville declined to interfere directly in the city's affairs. Grenville himself, played down his influence in Bristol - "a stranger myself to that place, I have very little
pretensions to any interest there.17

Opposition in Bristol to Romilly's selection as a candidate was led by Alderman Robert Claxton, the President of the Whig Club, and Joseph Atwell Small the latter of whom wrote to Grenville in December 1811. The candidate they favoured to replace Evan Baillie was Admiral George Berkeley, a former M.P. for Gloucestershire for 27 years - "in these sentiments, I understand, the whole club coincide. They would indeed have been unanimous, had not a conference taken place between Mr. Alderman Noble and Sir Samuel Romilly on the same subject". Romilly's decision to accept the invitation was described as unfortunate - "it would not only divide the interest, but create an unnecessary, useless and very heavy expense". Small expressed the hope that when circumstances were explained to Romilly he would see things in their proper light and stand down. Grenville, however, forwarded this letter to Romilly and, despite noting a long friendship with Berkeley and a family connection through his brother Lord Buckingham, expressed continued support for Romilly.18 Berkeley dropped out of the running soon after this, his supporters having presumably received an unfavourable response to a preliminary canvass of electors. One supporter of Romilly had argued that the fact that the Admiral was in possession of an active naval command ruled him out of the question; another noted that his "unfortunate secession of the County of Gloucester... has created him so many enemies that, with all the influence of Mr. Claxton, it is the general opinion that if he could ever obtain a majority in his favour in the club (which is not very probable) still the freemen at large would excite an opposition..."19 Late in December 1811, however, Romilly's supporters found themselves faced with a new threat when Protheroe announced his intention to come forward as a candidate through a notice in the Bristol newspapers. Protheroe was in his late thirties, had been born in the city where he had "carried on a very extensive commercial West India concern", and had retired from business with a very considerable fortune. He had received plaudits for his stewardship as mayor in 1805 and, according to Noble, had he come forward as soon as he had known of Baillie's intention to retire no-one would have opposed him. However, Protheroe had been solicited to offer himself before, but, being of a retiring disposition, had previously declined:
"...that disposition of his inclines me to suspect that the Admiral's principal friend, finding he should be in a minority has prevailed upon Mr. Protheroe at this time to declare. I own this circumstance is extremely unpleasant, and injurious to the interest of Sir Samuel". (20)

At a stormy meeting of the Independent and Constitutional Club in January 1812, however, Sir Samuel Romilly was selected as the whig candidate for the next General Election by a majority of 3:1 (the Journal reported that the booing, hissing and whistling "rendered it impossible to obtain an accurate report of the addresses." 21) Protheroe decided to disregard the decision and continue his candidature. Romilly had been flattered by the invitation from Bristol and had responded cautiously, but favourably, to overtures. He preferred to avoid a contest with its expense and trouble and expressed a strong wish not to enter upon a personal canvass of the voters. He did not believe that votes should be gained by "personal attention and individual flattery and the other little artifices that are so often resorted to at elections". The way to canvass for votes was by principled behaviour in Parliament. He also expressed concern about his ability to serve the city in regard to the numerous commercial and business demands which were placed upon a Member of Parliament for Bristol, but was reassured on this count. 22 Romilly adhered to a distinctively downbeat style of electioneering - the antithesis of a rabble-rousing approach; ironically, given his own social background, he had a patrician distaste for public meetings and popular opinion:

"No conduct can, in my eyes, be more criminal than that of availing oneself of the prejudicial clamours of the ignorant or misinformed, to accomplish any political purpose, however good or desirable in itself. If I use strong language and take a bold part for the people, it should be in the House of Commons, not in Palace Yard..." (23)

Persistent requests from Bristol, however, eventually persuaded him first to publish an address, and then to visit the city in April 1812, in order to show himself, and to attend a public dinner in his honour. To his embarrassment his entrance into the city was hijacked by a 'spontaneous' cheering crowd led by electors on horseback and attended by several Trade Societies with trumpets and banners, who insisted on charing him into town. At the dinner, attended by 270 men, watched from the gallery by 70 ladies, and
entertained by the band of the Oxford Militia in full uniform, Romilly's speech was reportedly "very favourably received", although he took pride in it on unusual grounds:

"Its merit consisted more in what I omitted than in what I said. I touched upon no topics calculated to court popular favour. I said nothing of a reform of Parliament, of pensions, of sinecures, of economy in the public expenditure, of peace, or of any other subjects which are at the present moment generally so favourably received in public assemblies ". (24)

Romilly's political stance is difficult to pin down; one recent historian sees him as a key member of the distinctive 'Mountain' group of M.P.s, and makes a distinction in the whig ranks between Grenvillites, Conservative Foxites, and progressives (the latter comprising 'The Mountain' and a few Foxite whigs). Romilly's experiences at Bristol, however, indicate that he does not fit neatly into this particular mould. Dr Rapp identifies 21 Mountaineers, proud middle class men chafing at the aristocratic ethos of the party, concerned about maintaining their independence, and critical of the corrupt and exclusive practices of the whig oligarchy. Given Romilly's relationship with his aristocratic supporters at Bristol, however, one is far from finding "hostility to the Grenvillites conservatism...[and]...moral disgust at their place-hunting". It is axiomatic that the whigs were rent with divisions at this time, and that in the ranks of reforming professional whigs there was a large degree of frustration at the complacency and apathetic timidity of high whiggism, but categorisation is fraught with problems. It is safer to describe Romilly as a staunchly independent whig who was very much his own man. At least a degree of doubt can be cast upon the unity of the 'Mountain' as a coherent entity.

The final result of the election of October 1812 was Hart Davis, 2,895, Protheroe, 2,435, Romilly, 1,683 and Hunt 523. Romilly retired on the ninth day of the poll and left Bristol thoroughly disillusioned with the electoral process, concluding that "the merits of the candidates had less influence on the decision of the election that the colour of a riband". He fell a long way short of the 3,000 votes which canvass returns had indicated were promised to him, and which had made his supporters "sanguine nay, certain of success". Chicanery was employed in delaying the poll, with long speeches made upon procedural technicalities and
objections lodged against every voter. After two days of wasted attendance and "the useless sacrifice of so much time", Romilly's supporters could not be persuaded to attend again until they were certain that they would be able to give their votes. This allowed Protheroe to form a coalition with Hart Davis and get ahead in the poll. Hart Davis' election in the tory interest, with the substantial financial backing of the Stedfast Club, had never been in doubt and the contest was always going to be for second place. The voting reflected a clear division of political opinion in Bristol into reformers and anti-reformers. Of 4,386 electors who voted, 2,141 split their votes between Davis and Protheroe and this made up 88% of Protheroe's total vote. Romilly had 764 plumpers (46% of his vote) and Protheroe only 191 (8%). Only 86 voters split their votes between Romilly and Protheroe, who were theoretically closest in their political opinions. The evidence given to the committee of the House of Commons which examined Hunt's subsequent petition against the legality of the election, and particularly the evidence of Romilly, revealed the election to have been more rowdy than the contemporary newspaper reports had cared to admit. Although the petition was not upheld, the evidence provided some substance for each of Hunt's claims which included allegations of bribery, treating, and intimidation. At one point, to give the impression that Romilly would very quickly give up the contest once he had fallen behind, his opponents booked a place on the London mail coach in his name and paid for it. Perhaps less important than the actual outcome of the election, however, is what it tells us about the political, social, and religious differences within the liberal cause.

Protheroe described himself as a "loyal, constitutional Whig", but as Charles Elton, a supporter of Romilly put it, he advocated a "neutral and negative whiggism" which was "of so delicate and sensitive a texture, that it shrinks from the touch". At a public meeting in 1807 Protheroe had seconded a motion for an address of congratulation to the King on dismissing the Ministry of All the Talents. In response to a private question seeking to elicit his views on parliamentary reform during the election, Protheroe promised that he would vote in "favour of any measure which sought to reduce aristocratic borough influence," but publicly his views, as regards religious toleration and constitutional
reform, were hedged around with qualifications. At a dinner in his honour it was reported that there was "much laughter at the toast, "A natural Bristol whig, and may it never be scratched by London or French fashions". There was more than one barbed reference and inference in this toast. Romilly's grandfather was heir to a considerable landed estate at Montpellier in the South of France and Sir Samuel found it necessary to defend himself from the false charge of his being a foreigner. There was a further slur implied that he was in favour of French revolutionary principles, and the point was forced home that Romilly was an outsider and stranger. There was a conventional split then in Bristol between old Burkean whigs, and whigs and reformers of more advanced views. This same split took place on a municipal level in 1812. The corporation had been an 'old whig' stronghold, but its unpopularity in the early nineteenth century caused by its squandering of resources on dinners, high salaries and display, was reflected in the difficulties it had in filling corporation posts, despite increasing fines for refusing to serve. As Latimer puts it:

"The final defeat of the party in the civic chamber seems to have been due to the reckless conduct of its leaders, who lost the sympathy of the younger whigs out of doors".

There are hints here of a generational difference in the response of individuals to events of the 1790's and the early nineteenth century, a theme recently utilized to good effect in explaining differences of emphasis amongst whigs at Westminster after 1809. After 1812 the whig element on the Bristol corporation quite rapidly "dwindled away to insignificance'. Of 16 aldermen appointed from 1812-1821, 13 were Tories, whilst of 18 common councillors appointed during the same period only 6 were whigs. The post of recorder filled in March 1818, March 1827 and September 1828, was each time given to a Tory. New political and social forces were clearly making themselves felt in 1812; the very fact that the understanding which had existed among local politicians since 1790 to share the representation was broken up, and led to a costly struggle, was indicative of this.

Bristol's economy, society, and politics were dominated by a small number of influential merchant families who had made their fortunes whilst Bristol boomed in the eighteenth century - families such as the Daubemys, Brights, Harfords, Protheroes, Daniels, Baillies, Palmers, Pinneys, Fripps, Georges, Ameses, and Winwoods.
In the early nineteenth century, the corporation and these wealthy families constituted what a Tory journalist described as a "commercial aristocracy". Many of them were, of course, Tory in their politics but not all. They were a close-knit community, united by common trade interests, business partnerships, and personal ties of friendship and marriage. A recent thesis by Dr. Baigent on Bristol society in the late eighteenth century, based upon computer analysis of late eighteenth-century directories, poll books, and rates and tax returns identified an emergent middle class. She established that professional and leisured suburban groups were beginning to challenge the supremacy of the traditional elite, and overseas merchants - commercial expansion and spa development at Hotwells had brought increased demand for customs officials, brokers, lawyers, and doctors. She sought to revise the impression of a static social structure which had been produced by a concentration on elite institutions such as the Merchant Venturers. The 1812 election seems to provide additional evidence of the working to the surface of social tensions. The Independent and Constitutional Club was, reportedly, insufficiently 'respectable' for prominent whigs like the Prothero family. By backing Romilly, reforming whigs were publicly challenging the oligarchic power exercised by the small group of established merchant families. They tended to be further differentiated from the Protheroe family's supporters in that they were predominantly religious dissenters. Romilly, reforming whigs were publicly challenging the oligarchic power exercised by the small group of established merchant families. They tended to be further differentiated from the Protheroe family's supporters in that they were predominantly religious dissenters. Romilly, reforming whigs were publicly challenging the oligarchic power exercised by the small group of established merchant families. They tended to be further differentiated from the Protheroe family's supporters in that they were predominantly religious dissenters. Romilly, reforming whigs were publicly challenging the oligarchic power exercised by the small group of established merchant families. They tended to be further differentiated from the Protheroe family's supporters in that they were predominantly religious dissenters. Romilly, reforming whigs were publicly challenging the oligarchic power exercised by the small group of established merchant families. They tended to be further differentiated from the Protheroe family's supporters in that they were predominantly religious dissenters. Romilly, reforming whigs were publicly challenging the oligarchic power exercised by the small group of established merchant families. They tended to be further differentiated from the Protheroe family's supporters in that they were predominantly religious dissenters.
of trade in Great Britain". The precise magnitude of the direct and indirect stake of Bristol in the West Indies economy is difficult to pin down and one cannot simply take at face value claims such as those by George Thomas that "without the West Indies trade Bristol would be but a fishing port", or Charles Pinney "that five-eights of the whole trade of Bristol depends on the West India colonies", since they were made in the heat of partisan conflict, but undoubtedly the connection was considerable. The connections included absentee owners, shipping interests, mercantile and banking houses, and manufacturing the finished product of colonial raw materials such as sugar and tobacco. In the late 1820's five members of the corporation owned plantations and another fourteen had sugar refining or merchandising interests dependent upon the continued health of traffic to the west. One estimate credits Bristol with receiving £442,950 compensation in 1833 in respect of 14,533 slaves, and this represented only a fraction of the West Indian assets of the principal owners. In 1830 emancipation without adequate compensation seemed to threaten financial ruin for a substantial minority of merchants. The issue also needs to be placed within the context of the relative economic decline of the port of Bristol in the early nineteenth century. It was losing out to Liverpool and Southampton for a variety of reasons, including the gradual weakening of the West Indian connection, uncompetitively high port dues, the development of Swansea, Cardiff, and Newport, which took away the trade of South Wales, and the fact that Lancashire, the hinterland of Liverpool, was the theatre of the classical period of the industrial revolution, whilst there was no comparable industrialization of South West England. Property values, normally a reliable guide to an area's vitality had by one calculation, depreciated by between 30% and 40% in the three decades prior to 1833. It was not, moreover, simply a case of maintaining the profits of a commercial elite - the jobs of shipwrights, mariners, pilots and sailmakers were at stake and thus they tended to constitute a bloc vote on the Tory and West Indian whig side. West India issues could not fail to have political reverberations within Bristol, at a time when the abolition of slavery was being discussed in the House of Commons. As J.B. Kington later put it:

"You may pass muster equally well whether Whig or Tory, provided you are a good West Indiaman and properly submissive to the Sugar Lords, but if you declared for Free
Trade or, wearied with the imposition of undue prices, attempt to break through the monopoly by making a purchase in the London Market, you are denounced as 'an enemy to your native city'. " (44)

At the 1830 General Election the political, social and religious conflicts which had been simmering in Bristol since 1812 came to a head in an extremely virulent and expensive contest, which was again fought out to all intents and purposes within the whig ranks.

West India merchants were a powerful lobby within parliament amounting to about 30 M.P.'s, and there were frequent petitions to parliament and deputations to ministers. R.H. Bright, Bristol's moderate whig M.P. from 1820-1830 was one of the spokesmen on behalf of West India interests in the House of Commons, but he expressed a wish to stand down in 1830. Ironically, the man that anti-slavery, reforming whigs turned to was Edward Protheroe, junior, son of the former M.P. who they had so strongly criticized. He had sat in the previous parliament as M.P. for Evesham and had very recently seconded Lord Brougham's notion on the abolition of slavery on 13 July 1830. The two whig factions met on 16 July 1830 at the Assembly Rooms where Quaker and Baptist supporters of Protheroe were in a minority and West India whigs nominated J.E. Baillie, also the son of a former M.P., Evan Baillie who had represented Bristol from 1803-1812. J.E. Baillie had been M.P. for Tralee from 1813-1815 and in 1820 was nominated for Bristol against his consent. His estates contained 2,300 negroes, although much play was made during the election campaign of his good treatment of them, and on the Act for the Abolition of Slavery in the English Colonies coming into force on 1 August 1834, he received compensation of £12,967.

A printed letter relating to the Bristol election of 1830 argued that:

"There is not one Election in the Kingdom which is likely to excite a hundredth part of the interest that this must do as a direct contest of principle between the Friends and Enemies of Negro Slavery". (50)

This was an exaggeration and the letter was probably intended to help raise funds outside the city, but the election certainly attracted national attention, although not because it had any particular reference to the balance of power in the House of Commons. The political situation at Westminster in mid 1830 can only be described as confused, and earlier in the year Protheroe had observed
"So many different parties were they divided into that the House seemed to be more like a nursery of young statesmen than a collection of established politicians". (51)

The Duke of Wellington's administration was, according to Lord Howick writing to his father in February 1830, "supported by most whigs". The General Election did little to clarify matters. Contemporaries made valiant attempts to assess the success or failure of nominal whig and Tory parties in numerical terms, but all the estimates were "based on the same lack of evidence about the opinions of the new members, and even on dubious estimates of the opinions of the old". (53) Taking Southwark, Reading, and Yorkshire as his examples, Professor Gash argued that:

"... seen in detail, the most striking feature of these individual elections is the importance of local and personal factors... there were no clear party policies, and candidates came to terms as best they could with the electorate". (54)

The tone of the election at Bristol was set from the moment of Protheroe's entrance into the city by carriage. He refused the offer of his supporters to pull him in themselves, on the grounds that this would be inconsistent with his sentiments on human liberty:

"... the man who came to advocate the emancipation of the negro could never allow white men, and especially his friends and fellow citizens, to be yoked, in order to perform that labour which alone belonged to beasts." (55)

Protheroe explicitly linked the condition of Bristol's freemen, and the rule of Tory and conservative whig West India interests, to that of the enslaved negro, and in addition advocated parliamentary reform, a cheap loaf and the abolition of pensions and sinecures. Of Protheroe's enthusiastic welcomers an observer could note:

"It must be confessed they were chiefly of the middle and lower classes, and that, notwithstanding Mr. Protheroe's connexions in this city, not one great merchant or banker sent his carriage or came himself to meet him, so close do they hang together". (56)

The historian of the anti-slavery campaign in Bristol pointed out that "the relative importance of the coincidental campaigns for political reform, both in the city and county at large, and for abolition, is virtually impossible to assess", but added that "opposition to slavery provided a moral aspect of a political
issue of broader significance - the direction and management of the whig interest in Bristol." Once again, as in 1812, the challenge failed and the voting ended Hart Davis 5,012, Baillie 3,378, Protheroe 2,843. It was stated at the time that this election cost over £34,000 and that Baillie’s share of the outlay was £18,000. But on this occasion reforming whigs came closer to success, in part because Protheroe was generously backed by Quaker money and support from within Bristol, and from radically minded Quakers outside the city such as Joseph Sturge of Birmingham and James Cropper from Liverpool, the latter of whom subscribed £500. The election cost Protheroe and his supporters about £7,000 - £2,000 for enrolling freemen, £1,250 for assembling outvoters, £750 printing and £1,850 general expenses. It helped to crystallize the distinction between masters and men, between those who exercised power and those who did not, and was thus an inevitable component of the reform movement in the city. Certainly tradesmen were subjected to commercial intimidation, and threatened or actual loss of orders, which was strong even by Bristol standards. The editor of the Bristol Mercury reported:

"... we have met with tradesmen... who having voluntarily pledged themselves to support the man of their choice... have been compelled to turn their backs upon him by the threats held out by some West Indian aristocrats."

The intervening elections between 1812 and 1830, although contested, did not have the same national profile and significance, although this did not prevent a great deal of heat being generated and quasi-ritual violence, which continued even if there were few major differences or antagonisms between the candidates. In 1826 a local diarist noted that "the election of new members was carried on with very great violence, although there was little political differences of opinion". Breaking the windows of the opponents' election headquarters was standard practice, and the Bush Hotel, the centre of whig operations was sacked in both 1826 and 1830. During a public inquiry, following the infamous Bristol riots of October 1831, the town's sheriff was asked whether there had been any previous riots in the recent past of the city and replied:

"I hardly know how to answer the question for we have had contested elections, since I have been under-sheriff, and the usual exhibitions have taken place there, amounting as much to riot, as the demolition of the Mansion House... in fact, I believe there has never been a contested election in my time at Bristol in which that ceremony has not formed a part".
The election results were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Candidate 1</th>
<th>Votes 1</th>
<th>Candidate 2</th>
<th>Votes 2</th>
<th>Candidate 3</th>
<th>Votes 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1818</td>
<td>R. H. Davis</td>
<td>3,377</td>
<td>R. H. Bright</td>
<td>2,997</td>
<td>Edward Protheroe</td>
<td>2,250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1820</td>
<td>R. H. Bright</td>
<td>2,811</td>
<td>Edward Protheroe</td>
<td>2,811</td>
<td>R. H. Davis</td>
<td>3,377</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1826</td>
<td>R. H. Davis</td>
<td>3,887</td>
<td>R. H. Bright</td>
<td>2,315</td>
<td>Col. H. Baillie</td>
<td>1,684</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Candidates nominated without their knowledge, or without their consent.*

The Bristol elections of 1818 and 1820 have been the subject of comprehensive and competent previous study. At the former contest, Edward Protheroe stood on independent whig principles but had in many instances, by his votes and speeches, acted in a manner directly opposed to his professions and was given a rough ride by reformers. He was haunted by his words in 1812:

"He who stands forward as a candidate for popular favour places himself as it were on a pedestal and challenges public inquiry and woe be to his hopes if he cannot stand the scrutiny". (63)

Protheroe had voted at Westminster for a continuance of the Property Tax, in favour of a variety of sinecures such as an embassy to Portugal, and in favour of the suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act in 1817. He had approved, moreover, a Tory sponsored declaration in February 1817 by the 'Magistrates, Clergy, Merchants, Traders, Householders and inhabitants of the city of Bristol and its neighbourhood' which expressed anxiety and alarm at the dangerous spirit of insurrection abroad in the county. A supporter from 1812 complained:

"I cannot find a vestige in Parliament of that Mr. Protheroe who voluntarily promised me that he should rejoice to promote the destruction or diminution of that Aristocratical Borough influence which at present disgraces our system". (64)

He survived, however, after a hesitant Colonel Hugh Baillie was proposed as a candidate by more reformist whigs, and successively accepted, withdrew, and then once more accepted the nomination. All three contests in 1818, 1820 and 1826 lay between "the chosen representative of Old Whiggery" and a popular, albeit not always willing, third candidate. Freemen across the county eagerly sought for a 'third man' since they not surprisingly preferred election contests, for the financial gain and general excitement that would be involved, to a compromise by the sitting M.P.s seeking to avoid the expense of a contest. The Tory party regularly threw its
influence into the scale of the more moderate whig candidate. There was retrospective criticism from Bristol reformers of the 'Old Whigs':

"men who are satisfied with ringing eternal changes on 'the glorious 1688' - whose patriotism is altogether an after dinner affair - who have stood aloof from the popular struggle, and done nothing to assist the popular cause". (65)

There certainly appeared to be a resounding lack of interest shown by more socially influential Bristol Whigs in the question of reform. The meeting which called Baillie to stand in 1818 spoke of the "...vital necessity of reform in the popular representation..." but a significant number of Baillie's Bush Tavern Committee had themselves signed the 1817 declaration condemning radical reform (23 out of 42) and thus Baillie, the choice of reformers, had no wish to alienate his substantial supporters with talk of visionary schemes for Parliamentary Reform.

The haphazard and uncertain quality of liberal organization at this time is very apparent. There were misunderstandings, divisions, and a lack of money. There was a longwinded and fruitless public squabble, for example, between Charles Elton an apologist for Baillie, and C.H.Walker, writing on behalf of reformers who blamed Baillie's vacillation for the whig defeat in 1818, and rows within Protheroe's committee, and amongst his brothers, which related to the running up of expenses contrary to his instructions. When Protheroe declined in 1820, whig West India merchants selected Robert Bright, whilst a discontented section of the party and a number of freemen nominated J.E.Baillie without his consent (he withdrew on the second day). Finally, in 1826, an amicable arrangement to avoid an election was once more denounced by reformers, discontented with Bright's conservative votes on religious disabilities and other questions. Once more a candidate who had declined to stand (Edward Protheroe, Junior) was brought to the poll, to the great joy of freemen. Supporters of liberal principles baulked at the idea of political association for the purpose of selecting an M.P., and holding him to account. In March 1820 C.H.Walker proposed a subscription, inviting freemen, and all others favourable, to a constitutional reform of parliament, to become subscribers to the 'Bristol Independent Election Fund', to pay for the lawful expenses of an approved candidate and provide for poor men, who suffered financially for
having voted conscientiously, but the suggestion provoked no response.69 And in July 1826 the Bristol Gazette appealed to the better informed voters of Bristol who were not marshalled in the Tory interest, to make provision during a parliamentary session for election expenses:

"A party, whatever be its name, can have no claim to Independence, unless it provide itself with means; and really we do not see with what consistency any individual, or set of individuals, can call a representative to account for his parliamentary conduct, when such a representative has incurred all the expenses of his election".

It rejected the idea that if a club existed, the member must be considered as at its service:

"Is it not better that the Membership be accountable to some known body, than that his negligencies be obliterated by the expenditure of a few extra pounds". (70)

Such arguments, however, fell on deaf ears at a time when party was in abeyance. The Bristol Mercury had argued a month earlier that party distinctions had "long ceased to have an active existence", and, during the election, Charles Pinney, Bright's leading supporter noted that addresses of candidates throughout the county tended to embrace very similar views. (71)

In the realm of extra-parliamentary politics Bristol was never able to organize a body of equivalent weight to the York Whig Club. Early in 1819 reformers established a Bristol Concentric Society in an attempt to secure "the concentration of the independent interest" which was dedicated to return candidates pledged to support civil and religious liberty, economy and parliamentary reform. With a motto borrowed from Lord Nelson ("England expects every man to do his duty") and stimulated by the national election result of 1818, members were to subscribe one guinea per annum and aimed to build up a fund to protect individuals' employment and assist petitions to the House of Commons against an election return. It was proposed that general meetings would be held quarterly, and that a committee of 21, elected by ballot, would meet monthly and more often if necessary.72 The club has been represented as a typical example of the successful urban middle class reform societies that were springing up around the country at this time,73 however the Bristol Concentric Society did not make any waves beyond the city and few within it. Its leaders lacked the social and political weight of their counterparts at Liverpool. Indeed a
contrast with the relatively successful Concentric Club at Liverpool is instructive. The Bristol society only became visible briefly in October 1819 in the aftermath of 'Peterloo' when a subscription of £50 was forwarded to a Westminster committee for victims of the actions of the military, on the margins at the 1820 election, and in July 1821 when it resurrected Queen Caroline's cause only two days before the coronation's celebrations. The final evidence of the existence of the society appeared in the correspondence columns of the tory Bristol Journal in February 1822, and this provided evidence that it was distinctly a radical as opposed to a whig organization and of relatively lowly social status:

"Whiggism in Bristol is extinct, or else it is so connected with Radicalism, that I must wait for the annual meeting of a new society recently formed in your city, and designated the Concentric, to know what are the principles which my old whig friends and acquaintances in Bristol at this day profess". (74)

Liverpool politics, too, were strongly influenced by a small number of merchants peculiarly interested in the West Indies trade, and possessed a similarly venal freeman electorate of about 3,000, but its Concentric Society enjoyed a decade of comparative success. The society was formed immediately after the defeat of Henry Brougham and Thomas Creevey in the general election of 1812 when many reformers had been "buoyed up by extravagant and delusive expectations of success". It was established, according to a later chairman "as a kind of rallying point where the supporters of liberal principles might by mutual counsel and co-operation, prepare themselves to maintain the cause of freedom". The society enjoyed competent local leadership, and prominent Liverpool reformers such as William Roscoe and the Reverend William Shepherd were in regular correspondence with Brougham in the 1810's. It met regularly at the Vine Tavern, held annual dinners, and in addition gathered to celebrate other significant domestic and international occurrences, such as the end of hostilities with France, peace with America, and Brougham's return to parliament. It counted amongst its honorary members, in addition to Brougham and Creevey, Samuel Whitbread, the Duke of Norfolk, Major Cartwright, Thomas Coke, the Earl of Sefton, and Sir Francis Burdett, who addressed the society in 1818. It saw itself as maintaining provincial links with the rest of the country; in 1820, for example,
Samuel Nicoll, Marmaduke Wyvill and Laurence Dundas were all invited to the annual dinner, and there were toasts in honour of 'Mr. Nicoll and the York Whig Club' and 'Mr. Bright M.P. and the friends of freedom in Bristol'. The Liverpool society did not reach the heights of social homogeneity idealistically held out by Ottiwell Wood in 1820, who commented:

"I cannot but regret how little disposition the higher classes amongst us show to sympathize with, and to conciliate the people; whereas if instead of holding themselves aloof, they would unite their influence with the wisdom and intelligence of the middle classes, and the spirit and intelligence of the lower, they would best consult the dignity of the crown, and the best interests of the people". (78)

The society relied upon a core of perhaps 60-70 whig gentlemen merchants, bankers and professionals. Nevertheless it had an impressively high membership of 1,000 in 1819 and achieved several of its objectives. Social and charitable activities strengthened political loyalties, and in turn provided an institutional basis for electioneering and a platform for political argument. These arguments were amply publicized in the detailed press reports of Egerton Smith's Liverpool Mercury.  

It was not the case that there was no agitation at all in Bristol for Parliamentary reform. Indeed, in a letter to the Liverpool Concentric Society in September 1815, Major Cartwright held out Bristol as an example to the rest of the country after he had received a petition from the city signed by 11,000 people, in favour of radical reform.  

Bristol did not escape from the economic distress of 1816 and Henry Hunt addressed a petitioning meeting from a carriage on Brandon Hill on Boxing Day - he claimed as a result of this meeting to be delegated by Bristol to support annual parliaments and universal suffrage. In January 1817 the deputies of a London convention of Hampden Clubs carried Lord Cochrane shoulder high across Palace Yard to the door of Westminster Hall with a petition from Bristol signed by over 15,000 people in his arms "in a roll of parchment about the size of a tolerable barrel". But the gulf in Bristol between 'respectable' and radical reformers proved to be unbridgeable. Edward Protheroe (senior) spoke to the effect that not one of his constituents had asked him to support the petition and assured the House of Commons, when the petition was presented, that it did not convey the sentiments of the city of Bristol. He was unaware of who had composed
the meeting on Boxing Day 1816 - such people clearly did not exist in his eyes as a recognizable force, or at least they did not count. In line with this view, the radicals had been refused permission to use the Guildhall - which was hardly surprising - but had even been banned from constructing any hustings. The gulf between 'respectable' and radical reformers was further exemplified by the vilification directed at Dr. Edward Kentish after he attended a radical election meeting in June 1818, leading him to publish a pamphlet in self-defence of his presence and speech at the meeting.

The Peterloo affair and the Queen Caroline crisis both sparked newspaper debate and increased party political rivalry and activity in Bristol, but neither succeeded in really forging a union of reformers. The whig party quandry, when faced with formulating a response to the former episode, meant that responses varied in different parts of the country. It had little difficulty in condemning both the Manchester magistrates and incendiary radicals, but it was uncertain whether it would be to the advantage of the whig cause to organize a campaign in protest, and thus in general their response was tepid and lacking in enthusiasm (although Yorkshire, as described above, was an exception). James Mackintosh outlined their difficulties:

"It seems to me, that our popular strength, when we are not only without, but against both Radicals and Tories is not such as to give us a reasonable hope that we can guide these meetings. I should think that they will either stop short of us or go beyond us and I should hardly be able to decide whether our condition would be worse after being defeated by the Tories or conquering by the treacherous and odious help of the radicals". (83)

John Moggridge, a Monmouth landowner, who acted as an intermediary between the whig leadership and active reformers on the ground in South Wales and Gloucestershire, wrote to Lord Grey requesting information as regards a provincial response, and hoping for a direct lead:

"It is perpetually demanded of me by the whigs of Monmouthshire what line of conduct the heads of our party will adopt in regard to the late proceedings at Manchester... I hoped that these questions might have been satisfactorily answered by some public demonstration on the part of our friends in different quarters... As regards myself the necessity for this is urgent, as I am informed by the post today that the Bristolians have resolved to send me a deputation for the purpose of learning my sentiments on the subject of a meeting there..." (84)
No advice was forthcoming, however, and whigs were inactive at Bristol. The mayor refused radicals the use of the Guildhall for a meeting in October 1819, and thus, led by Thomas Stocking and C.H. Walker, they were forced to meet in the open air on Brandon Hill. The Bristol Journal could comment that "a more insignificant meeting in point of rank, talent or consequence, was surely never before assembled in Bristol". Estimates of attendance varied from 1,500 to 10,000 and the chairman pointedly noted the absence of "a certain class of gentleman". The whigs were criticized for their apathy and indifference to the sufferings of the people, "sufficient to justify an opinion that the people had little further to expect from whiggish assistance". Provincial reactions to the Queen Caroline affair, and variations in political interpretation were considerable. Both the Bristol Mercury and Bristol Gazette were vociferous in their antipathy towards George IV and defence of Caroline in 1820, and the latter could comment in July, "the QUEEN is still the only topic of public interest". An address to the Queen was signed by 24,640 and an additional women's petition was signed by a further 14,000, although the Bristol Journal launched a savage attack on the social status of the signatories. Sir Robert Wilson presented the address from Bristol in the House of Commons and the Mercury could comment of a meeting to congratulate the Queen on the abandonment of the Bill of Pains and Penalties in November 1820 that:

"Seldom have been collected at any public assembly for political purposes in this city, a more powerful concentration of wealth and talent, as met in the Guildhall... all the leading men both of the whig and popular party were present". (88)

The Queen's victory was greeted by the majority of people in Bristol with demonstrations of delight and a spontaneous illumination of private and public premises took place on 13 November. At least one seasoned Tory observer of Bristol affairs gained an impression of increasing unity between whigs and radicals, although his analysis of local politics was distinctly simplistic:

"Party never ran higher than at present. There are three decided parties. 1. The Tories (if they may be so called) that is the High Government men, the Church and King men. 2. The Whigs, i.e., those who want a reform in Parliament, who wish to pull down the Aristocracy. These are enemies of the present Ministry; the Dissenters are almost all of them of this party. 3. The Radicals i.e., The Mob and their leaders, whose sole object is a Revolution and
Plunder. These are formidable for their numbers, and some few of their leaders are men of talent, but most of them are mere ranters and declaimers... These two parties last mentioned at present coalesce in some degree; and the Queen is a mere tool in their hands". (90)

But Seyer's fears proved unfounded since whigs and radicals remained, in general, poles apart in Bristol. A more typical example of whig weakness in the city was seen at a fruitless meeting of 'the Electors of Bristol in the whig interest' in February 1820 which was adjourned as soon as it commenced because objectives had not been thought through. Frustration was evident in the speech of the acting chairman J.E. Lunell which referred to "the backwardness of the leading whigs in this city" and claimed that tory strength had "chiefly consisted in the divisions existing among their opponents":

"We cannot but lament, and deeply, this apparent want of organization - of unanimity, of co-operation, on the part of the whigs; the People seem enough inclined to take their proper station and ready to enrol themselves under any respectable leader, whose reputation should be a sufficient pledge of his principles...". (91)

After describing the proceedings at a number of county meetings in various parts of the country in favour of parliamentary reform in January 1823, the Bristol Mercury struggled in vain to exhort local leaders and reformers to exert themselves:

"Shall it be said that Bristol was a silent witness to the exertions of the rest of the country? Where are the Brights, the Eltons, the Ameses, the Georges, the Lunells, the Castles, the Sanderses and a long string of others who profess the principles of whiggism? Let us hope that Bristol will rouse herself from this apathy; that her citizens will not let it be said that while they were contemplating internal improvements which affected only the local interests of their city they were insensible to the more powerful chains which they shared in common with the country at large". (92)

In the mid 1820's there were many more non-contentious news items and the constant antagonism between the Bristol Mercury and Bristol Journal eased. More attention was given to local affairs connected with the commercial welfare of the city. The Bristol Gazette in January 1824 referred to, "the happy subsidence of so much of that rancorous party spirit, which but a very short time since existed amongst us". 93

An editorial in the Bristol Mercury in December 1830 noted
that the reform spirit was a long time coming to Bristol, and two weeks later charged the city with "tardiness" and "selfish insensibility":

"There is, we regret to say, a want of union among the reformers of our city, which prevents them from acting with that promptitude which each one is desirous of but no one considers it his especial duty to promote". (94)

Parliamentary reform lacked the immediacy as an issue that it possessed in cities such as Manchester, Birmingham and Leeds which had no independent spokesmen in parliament and were represented by county M.P.s. Bristol had an unusually wide franchise - approximately 6,000 freemen were qualified to vote in 1830 - and according to a contemporary pamphlet by a Mr. Montague Gore, 'The Practical Effects of the Reform Bill', the Reform Act of 1832 as originally formulated (i.e., with ancient rights voters disfranchised) would have led to a net loss of voters in Bristol. He estimated the number of household voters of between £10 and £20 to be 2,303 and over £20 to be 2,719. In addition to the lack of immediacy of parliamentary reform, moreover, other issues could assume priority in Bristol, such as the Corn Laws, the slavery question, or catholic emancipation. Overall it tended to be the case that Bristol followed in the wake of other cities rather than taking a lead. Edward Protheroe (Junior) asked the rhetorical question in a letter to the Mercury in January 1831:

"Is it true that the old spirit of Bristol is so bent to the yoke, that no man dares to utter his sentiments at a public meeting without the special permission of the hired agent of the West Indian aristocracy?". (97)

Given the influence of the Tory corporation and the Established Church as employers and dispensers of contracts and charity, and the importance of the West India trade for the city's economy and trade, the uncomfortable answer was that if an individual wanted to get on in Bristol it was sensible for him to keep his head beneath the parapet. In the following eighteen months, however, this Tory stranglehold was to fall temporarily into abeyance, in the face of strong reformist feeling, and the city's reform credentials were to receive close inspection - for all the wrong reasons - following a week of dramatic rioting and arson in October 1831.
FOOTNOTES


2. cf. D. Large, Radicalism in Bristol in the Nineteenth Century (Bristol, 1981).


10. Romilly II p.262.


15. B. L. Add. MSS 59420 (Grenville's Correspondence as High Steward of Bristol 1810-1832). J. Abercromby to Grenville 8 July 1811.


17. Romilly II 413-414.

18. B. L. Add MSS 59420 J. A. Small to Grenville 13 Dec. 1811, Grenville to Romilly 16 Dec. 1811

20. Ibid., Wintour Harris to Grenville 27 Dec. 1811.


23. Ibid.,

24. An Account of the entry of Sir Samuel Romilly into Bristol on Thursday April 2 1812; with a report of the speeches delivered on that occasion (Bristol, 1812) pp. 3, 8-9; Romilly II 21-27.


28. The Pollbook for Bristol, 1812; An Authentic Report of the Evidence and Proceedings before the committee of the Hon. House of Commons appointed to try the merits of the Bristol election of October 1812 (Bristol, 1813).

29. An Account of the entry of Sir Samuel Romilly into Bristol.... 1812... pp. 28-29; C. H. Walker, An Address to the Electors of the United Kingdom, but in particular to those of Bristol and Chester (Bristol, 1812) pp. 28-29.

30. E. Kentish, A Narrative of facts relative to the Bristol Election as connected with the meeting on Brandon Hill, 13 June 1818 (Bristol, 1818) p. 9.

31. C. H. Walker, An Independent Address to the electors of Bristol (Bristol, 1812) pp. 11-12.


35. Bristol Journal 27 June 1812.

36. C.H. Walker, An Independent Address... p.xii.

37. An Account of the entry of Sir Samuel Romilly into Bristol... 1812.... pp.8-9.


40. P. Marshall, Bristol and the Abolition of Slavery: the politics of emancipation (Bristol, 1975) p.2. The following paragraphs draw upon some of the evidence and insights presented in this excellent pamphlet.


43. cf. J. Vincent, Pollbooks (1967).

44. J.B. Kington, City and Port of Bristol, Letters, Essays, Tracts etc., (Bristol, 1836) p.225.


46. eg. PD XII 28 Feb., 1825 Cols.744-745, 21 March 1825 cols. 1088-1089.

47. PD XXV 13 July 1830 Cols. 1192-1193.


49. C.H. Cave, A History of Banking in Bristol from 1750 to 1899 (Bristol 1899) pp.54-55; Bristol Journal 31 July 1830;

50. Hare MSS' (Bristol Record Office) B033 (2) Copy of printed letter concerning Bristol election, 26 July 1830.

51. PD XXII 4 Feb. 1830, Col.78.

52. Grey MSS Howick to Grey 15 Feb. 1830.


55. Hare MSS 8033 (3) Open letter to the citizens by 'Aristides'.

56. Ibid., 8033 (2) Copy of printed letter concerning Bristol election 26 July 1830.


63. Quoted in A Summary view of the Public Conduct of Edward Protheroe Esq., M.P .... (Bristol, 1818) (Bristol Ref. Lib 23168) p. 8.


65. Anon., Causes and Consequences of the Return of Two Tories to Represent the City of Bristol in Parliament (1835) pp. 4-5.


67. C. H. Walker, An Address to the honest and conscientious electors of Bristol on the recent election for that city (1819); C. A. Elton, An Apology for Col. Hugh Baillie in reply to some observations in Mr. C. H. Walker's Address to the electors of Bristol, (1819); C. H. Walker, A Second Address... a reply to Mr. Charles A. Elton's Apology, (1819); C. A. Elton, A Sequel to the Apology... in reply to C. H. Walker's second address (1819); C. H. Walker, A Third Address... (1819); Sir Henry Protheroe, A Full Account of the Late Election for Bristol vindicating the conduct of Edward Protheroe Esq. M.P.... (Bristol 1819); 'A Committee Man', A Full Detail of the Facts relative to the late election of Edward Protheroe Esq., ... (Bristol, 1819).


69. Bristol Mercury 14 March 1820.
70. **Bristol Gazette** 6 July 1826.

71. **Bristol Mercury** 22 May, 1826.

72. **Copy of Resolutions passed at the Formation of the Bristol Concentric Society on Saturday 23 January, 1819**, (Bristol City Library, Ref. 4576).

73. A. Mitchell, *Op.Cit.*, p.55. "the Concentric Societies of Liverpool and Bristol were similar bodies of urban middle class reformers".


76. **Liverpool Mercury** 11 Dec. 1818.


80. **Liverpool Mercury** 8 Sept. 1815.


83. **Holland MSS** B.L. Add. MSS 51653 Mackintosh to Holland 15 Sept., 1819.

84. **Grey MSS** John Moggridge to Grey 17 Sept., 1819.


86. **Bristol Gazette** 20 July 1820.

88. **Bristol Mercury** 27 Nov., 1820.


91. **Bristol Mercury** 21 Feb., 1820.


93. **Bristol Gazette** 3 Jan. 1824.

94. **Bristol Mercury** 11 Jan., 1831.

95. **Bristol Gazette** 28 July 1831.

96. Early in 1815, for example, there had been meetings and petitions against any alteration in the Corn Laws. There was a flurry of leaflets and handbills and a petition was signed by 43,000 people.

REFORM NEWSPAPERS IN THE PROVINCES.

Reform-minded provincial newspapers consciously regarded themselves as the voice of the liberal middle classes, whilst at the same time seeking to reflect their predominant interests and concerns. A Unitarian quarterly magazine, commented in 1834:

"The most important class in society, the class which gives the tone to public opinion, the middle class, is not composed of literary students or classical scholars, but, to a great extent of mere newspaper readers. Go into the house of a merchant or tradesman of wealth and influence, you will find a library of books but evidently intended more for show than use; a few of the lighter works of literature, belonging to a book club on a side table, one or two of the monthly magazines lying about, but even these rarely perused by the head of the family, who will not be slow to confess that nine-tenths of the time which he spends in reading are devoted to the newspaper". (1)

The extent and ways in which such readers were influenced by information and comment contained in their newspapers was a question earnestly debated in all of the leading contemporary periodical magazines at one time or another, and the question has continued to exercise historians down to the present day. Professor Aspinall went so far as to argue that, "it was the mass pressure of public opinion, formed by the Radical Press, acting on a reluctant Legislature which brought about the reform of Parliament in 1832". If the press was neither as crude nor, indeed, as effective a mechanism as this, newspapers did undoubtedly form a crucial part of that amalgam of contradictory voices and interests known as public opinion. The Reform Act and later reforms of the 1830's would have been unlikely to have taken place, or to have taken the form that they did, without the enlarged political awareness of large sections of the nation which newspapers, pamphlets, and books had helped to create. In any explanation of the elusive relationship between ideas and events at the centre, and the actions and views of the rank and file in the constituencies, newspapers are both a major source of information, which is often not available elsewhere, and a significant subject of interest in their own right. There have been surprisingly few attempts, however, to build upon the work of historians such as Asa Briggs, Derek Fraser, and Donald Read on early nineteenth century newspapers in Birmingham, Nottingham, Leicester, Leeds, Manchester and Sheffield, mostly written over twenty-five years ago, and it would still be fair to say that "the relationship
between the provincial press and provincial opinion has been largely ignored". 4 It was in their own localities that newspapers and their editors had most opportunity to influence not only opinion, but the course of events. Remarks seldom reached Parliament or the Government, but local leaders, corporations, and opinion-makers were well within earshot. Newspapers can be regarded as having four main functions: to succeed as a business enterprise, to publish information and news, to interpret news and thereby influence opinions, and to entertain their readers. The emphasis given to each function varied from paper to paper. This chapter, after providing a general background of developments in the provincial press down to about 1810, will primarily be concerned with the third function and will focus on three liberal newspapers, the Newcastle Chronicle, the Bristol Mercury and the York Herald, although naturally there will also be references to other reform newspapers, the Tory, and the professedly non-partisan press, for purposes of comparison.

Early accounts of the development of the English newspaper, whilst succeeding in achieving a laudably widespread coverage, tended to concentrate almost exclusively on the metropolitan press. There was some justification for this since, as one historian noted in 1887, "till recently, the provincial press has been to a large extent a reflex and imitation of the London press." 5 Many provincial newspapers were open to the charge of being timid 'scissors and paste' productions and editors were often primarily printers who published newspapers as a sideline. It was suggested that editors lacked the education and ability to write extensive original articles and certainly the pioneers of the provincial press had to face the social and intellectual hostility of London Whig circles well into the nineteenth century. Thomas Moore, for example, having congratulated himself after being the star speaker at a whig dinner in Derby in 1831, added:

"My brother orators were not such as it was difficult to eclipse; one of the 'gentlemen of the press' talked of the duty of 'editors lifting up their voices'."  

A contemporary analyst argued that editorial comment was deliberately excluded because the county editors, on account of the limited circulation of their newspapers, were; "... generally speaking, afraid of giving too much tone to the news they communicate, and by that means offend one or other of their subscribers, who may differ from them in political opinion, and thus abridge the number of their
advertising friends." London papers were not only the source of the bulk of news, but models on which printers based the layout of their own presses, and provincial newspapers closely resembled each other in format and content. The view from London was that the provincial press represented an echo of what was happening in the capital, albeit on occasions an impressive and resounding echo. Lord John Russell wrote in 1821:

"What statesman can bear with unshaken nerves that voice which, beginning in the whispers of the metropolis, rises into the loud tone of defiance within the walls of parliament, and is then prolonged by means of the hundred mouths of the press until its innumerable echoes rebound from the shores of Cornwall and the mountains of Inverness?" (7)

Provincial newspapers were therefore viewed by politicians as being less important as organs of public opinion than the London newspapers, whose opinions possessed considerable influence if the oft-repeated concerns in the correspondence of leading whig politicians from the 1810's onwards are taken as a guideline. Although the whigs held a potential command over a number of provincial newspapers it was not considered worthwhile to directly control or subsidize them. There were, however, attempts to mobilize and encourage faithful London newspapers even if the whigs "practical achievements with regard to the press were never proportionate to their avowed intentions." Contemporary politicians may have underestimated the influence of the provincial newspaper which was the only paper seen by considerable sections of the community, and was thus arguably "far more extensive and absolute within its range" than a London journal. Whig leaders might well have been advised to heed the advice of provincial editors such as Egerton Smith of the Liverpool Mercury who argued that were he in possession of an ample fortune he would:

"Cheerfully devote no inconsiderable portion to the establishment of constitutional public journals, in those parts of the Kingdom where there might appear to be the most occasion for them" and expressed surprise that "amongst the various means adopted by the true friends to the British constitution for the dissemination of political information, they have never yet adopted a plan so simple..." (10)

Important changes took place in the content of several provincial newspapers from the early nineteenth century as editors ceased to derive all their news and opinions entirely from London and sought to shape and make public opinion. Factors holding back the development
of newspapers in the eighteenth century included mechanical difficulties hindering production, the backwardness of communication and transport systems, the level of illiteracy among the population, heavy taxation, and legal restrictions on what was allowed to be printed, but many, if not all, of these problems were gradually overcome in the first four decades of the nineteenth century. The newspaper stamp returns from 1837-38 showed that provincial papers commanded half as much revenue again as the London papers despite the fact that they were published in the main on a weekly rather than a daily basis.

The late eighteenth century press has been used to impressive effect by historians of popular politics during this period to explore developments in particular localities or the popular response to particular issues. Newspapers and a variety of other printed material were an integral part of Brewer's 'alternative structure of politics' boosted by the Wilkite agitation of the 1760's, and Cookson has shown in his account of 'The Friends of Peace' association that despite the wartime legal restrictions imposed by Pitt's ministry in the 1790's, vigorous debate continued to be joined by opposition newspapers. A knowledge of, and leading on from this, an interest in political affairs percolated down the social scale during this period, at a time when public opinion as a meaningful concept came of age. The most important factor in the formation and expression of public opinion was the newspaper press - as John Stuart Mill wrote in 1823:

"In this instrument may be seen not only an appropriate organ of the public opinion tribunal, but the only regularly and constantly acting one". (13)

The part that newspapers played in the process of change was not necessarily overt - they fulfilled a vital purpose simply by gathering and disseminating current news or other knowledge. The influence of public opinion depended upon it being well-informed, which was why the hard-fought right to report the speeches and proceedings of parliamentary debates represented an important breakthrough. A feature of the later eighteenth century was the growth of a vibrant, mainly urban, political culture of which newspapers were an indispensable feature. Before the development of other forms of mass communication newspapers were the chief means, indeed almost the only means other than word of mouth, whereby ideas could circulate. Vigorous discussion was conducted through a widespread network
of London and provincial clubs, societies, coffee houses and taverns, where the public reading of papers commenced. The growth of the provincial newspaper (and the number of provincial presses approximately trebled between 1750 and 1800) made available in regional centres such as Newcastle, Bristol and York the sort of political intelligence and debate that flourished in London. Such developments helped to dispel ignorance, create a greater awareness of national events and issues, and began to provide various political grievances with a common focus. Some historians have cautioned against the view of the press as an active agent of change in the late eighteenth century, pointing to a lack of radical social criticism and arguing that conversely the press may have operated as a force for ministerial stability under Lord North and Pitt by acting as a safety valve for discontents. They argue that newspapers were a predominantly urban influence, penetrating little beyond the vicinity of the major towns and point to the dangers of overestimating levels of literacy, and exaggerating the impact of coffee-house and tavern culture. However, it is certainly the case that an increasing number of newspapers were being printed which, thanks to improvements in the physical communications between different regions, reached an increasing number of people. Moreover, from the 1760's onwards, over such issues as the Wilkes affair, the dispute with the American colonies, 'associational' activity in the 1780's, the abolition of the slave trade, and the French Revolution, 'public opinion' and a wider political nation was being brought more and more into play as a source of power. The connection between these two developments cannot be conclusively quantified, but such a connection undoubtedly existed.

It is important, however, to retain a sense of perspective as to the scale of provincial newspaper enterprises. The circulation of papers is notoriously difficult to ascertain but it was very small by modern standards. Newspaper stamps after 1833 provide only a rough guide to the number of actual copies sold, since attempts were made to furnish high figures artificially, but they do enable one to establish the relative position of papers within particular towns. Of 181 provincial newspapers in April 1833 only 15 sold more than 2,000 copies a week, 40 sold over a 1,000 copies but the great majority sold less than a 1,000. Estimates by contemporaries as to the number of people who read each paper in commercial exchanges, reading rooms or taverns varied enormously - an informed
observer in the *London and Westminster Review* in 1830 put the figure at 30, but a common estimate given by historians is 15-20, although this is a figure which is to some extent plucked out of the air. Raymond Williams put the newspaper reading public in 1820 at about 1% of the adult population, although this seems to be a conservative calculation. Stamped newspapers built up an effective subscription system for private individuals and institutions; in Bristol in 1831, for example, the Commercial Rooms boasted 650 subscribers to 48 newspapers. The fact remains, however, that newspapers were simply too expensive for most people to afford, and were operating in a hostile financial environment. During the period 1815-1833 the so-called 'Taxes on Knowledge' were at their peak. There was a 4d. Excise Stamp to pay for every copy of a paper printed, Paper Duty of 3d. per 1 lb. of printing paper, and a duty on each published advertisement of 3s.6d. In a paper costing 7d. approximately 5½d. represented taxation. Whilst the previous paragraph has highlighted exciting developments that were taking place in the later eighteenth century press, in 1800 most provincial newspapers remained staid, dull affairs with little additional comment or local news, and were a mixture of advertising, Parliamentary Debates, foreign news, and material lifted from the London press.

There continued to be widely circulated provincial newspapers without original articles well into the nineteenth century. It is a chastening thought for historians scouring newspaper files for political intelligence that even in the 1830's, as the table below indicates, papers which came closest to political neutrality such as the Newcastle Courant, Bristol Mirror, and York Courant were either the most popular local newspaper, or at least sold extremely well. This is an important reminder that not all readers were looking for strident editorials and opinionated letters columns. The informative element of a newspaper, features such as tide tables, shipping information, market prices, specialist advertising, accounts of fairs, bankruptcy cases, transport schedules, and the everyday details of births, deaths and marriages, were in many cases what a reader was chiefly interested in. Certainly the influence which reform newspapers might exert through their editorial columns depended upon the quality and reliability of the rest of the paper. Having said this, it is possible to detect a distinct turning point which occurred simultaneously in the content of many provincial newspapers within a relatively short period of time around the end of the first decade of
Parliamentary Papers, Newspaper Stamp Returns (1936)XLV, 348-351.

A return of the number of stamps issued each month by the stamp office 30 June 1835-30 April 1836.

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the nineteenth century. James Perry, editor of the London Morning Chronicle wrote in March 1812 that:

"In every part of the Kingdom, independent journals are now established... spreading the light of constitutional knowledge over the mass of the people".

and cited eight examples, the Leeds Mercury, Stamford News, Nottingham Review, Liverpool Mercury, Leicester Chronicle, Manchester Exchange Herald, Aberdeen Chronicle and the Hull Rockingham. The pioneering role of the Leeds Mercury under Edward Baines, which by 1811 was carrying two full columns of editorial comment with separate leading articles on two or more subjects, is well known, but it was only one example of a nationwide phenomenon. William Cobbett had noted in April 1809 that "Even the provincial papers, so long the vehicle for dull repetition, of borrowed and uninspired reflection... have now assumed animation of mind", and Francis Horner in 1810 referred to the importance of the press in educating and enlightening the people in respect to Catholic Emancipation; "The immense influence of the press in making one democracy (as it were) of the whole population, has been gained within these few years." The years 1809-1812 represented a crisis period for the government, although they faced a feeble Whig opposition. The war was becoming less popular, there were military setbacks such as the Walcheren disaster, economic hardship, a scandal involving the Duke of York, a large number of public meetings in towns and county centres to petition, for example, against the Orders-in-Council forbidding trade with enemy countries, and mounting campaigns to gain Catholic relief and reforms in the way that parliament was constituted. The Duke of York affair, in particular, when the King's second son, the Commander-in-Chief of the army, was accused of allowing the sale of officers' commissions at the behest of his mistress, had considerable ramifications. The newspapers reported the investigation to the exclusion of almost everything else, including the war. Although high-minded Whigs might regret the public's interest in scandal in high places as trivial, and tending to divert attention from topics which they conceived to be more important, the affair strengthened the belief of people outside politics, in the provinces, that public men were ineffectual and corrupt. If, as Lord Holland put it, "The Whigs as a body took no distinct or manly tone whatever upon this embarrassing situation", the episode had its effect in the country, on younger Whigs, and in the press. John Curwen, M.P. for Carlisle, in
introducing his Bill to abolish the sale of parliamentary seats in 1809 had claimed that "Now for the first time, the people call out for reform without instigation and purely on their own persuasion of its necessity", and reform newspapers began to articulate these calls for an alteration in the political system. After about 1810 political neutrality became increasingly difficult to maintain as local opinion polarized and newspapers emerged as representatives of different opinions. The views of reform newspapers were strengthened in the immediate post-war years when peace brought no economic relief and there was an intensification of reform agitation, with public meetings, petitions, and the establishment of political clubs and societies.

The people writing and distributing newspapers such as the Newcastle Chronicle, Bristol Mercury, and York Herald tended to share the same basic circumstances and condition of life as their readers. They were often excluded from landed society, the local urban elite, and the electorate, and thus, effectively, from the 'political nation'. The Hodgsons' personal experience at the Newcastle election in 1812, for example, can only have strengthened their desire to see household suffrage introduced. Sarah Hodgson wrote to her son James:

"You are quite wide of the mark when you suppose Ellison will give his printing to Tom... By way of letting you know how business is to be got - Frank Humble introduced himself to Mr. Ridley by saying there are some 70 freemen in the family and he hoped to be favoured with his printing. The same means were resorted to to Ellison by the old man - so what chance can non-freemen have at an election?". (27)

Provincial editors were usually known personally to their readers and to be at all effective had to stand above suspicion and to be well-informed. They were intermediaries between political, economic, and social theorists and their local readership, and a high level of general knowledge was required to deal with a variety of topics. Gibbon Merle, author of the Westminster Review article in 1830, detected a vast improvement in the previous thirty years in the skill and talent with which provincial papers were conducted, although the reduction of the stamp duty to ld., in 1836, which led to the establishment of an estimated 60 new provincial papers, created a temporary shortage of good editors. Joseph Parkes, writing to Brougham in the hope that he could suggest some names, described himself as "teased to death on the subject":

"You know that the under men of the London press are miserable sticks: the better reporters get higher
salaries than a country paper can afford". 28 Provincial editors were not well paid - few earned more than £250 a year, although many editors were also the proprietors of their own paper. Associated with proprietorship, however, was considerable financial risk. A large capital outlay was required for the launch of a provincial paper - one observer in 1836 put the figure at £4000 - 5,000 and the experiment to be successful would need to continue for at least five years. Thus, in recommending their papers to the public, editors almost invariably outlined the value of their prints to the advertiser more than to the news reader. To pay its expenses a paper needed to average 40-50 advertisements, and many did not achieve this break-even figure. 29 The newspaper office was a gathering point for information from a variety of sources - news could be communicated to editors by word of mouth, letters, or via inhabitants of the town, especially merchants and those who received regular letters, who were often prepared to hand on to printers information received. The office also tended to be a place where reform and other petitions lay for signature. Newspaper proprietors and editors were often active participants or interested parties in the events and meetings that they were describing - political insiders who sought to urge activity on sometimes reluctant readers. In general they were in a pivotal and highly visible position within the local community. 30 Provincial newspapers were aimed at a readership of tradesmen, farmers, businessmen and the leisured classes, for whom Saturday was the best day of publication. As the editor of the Bristol Mercury put it in April 1832, "The tradesman at the breakfast table, finds time to glance over his paper, and lays in a stock of answers for the benefit of his customers", on market day the comfortable farmer had a habit "as old as the French Revolution, of taking a newspaper home in his pocket with him from town", whilst others relaxed on a Saturday evening at home by "conning the week's news." 31 Newspapers were, in a sense, free publicity for a town's ruling classes; the names of committee members of charitable organizations were minutely detailed for posterity, resolutions with proposers and seconders were printed in full, and the names of subscribers with amounts given were listed for each new subscription, campaign or organization. One does not get a total picture of a town's life; stamped newspapers in Newcastle, Bristol and York provided a detailed reflection of the prevailing concerns of the wealthier inhabitants,
but generally lacked an understanding of, or sympathy with popular
culture and preoccupations. The *Bristol Mercury* gave short shrift,
for example, to the National Union of the Working Class and the
chartists, when they established branches in the city. It stated
frankly that "unless individuals of a certain status in society take
part in the proceedings of a meeting, its decision does not produce
any effect", although admitted that this was unjust.  

Determining what impact the content of newspapers had on
readers is problematic. The true nature of the interaction between
press and opinion is impossible to quantify with any precision.
Liberal reformers, seeing statistics on their side, stressed how
papers thrived by meeting an existing demand. Gibbon Merle claimed
that 80% of national weeklies in 1829 were liberal and that the pur-
chasers of liberal papers out-numbered purchasers of anti-liberal
ones by a ratio of 9:1. Whilst this was a distorted and favourable
gloss on the figures, the Tory J.W. Croker in 1822 believed that almost
the whole press was "loud for reform" and referred to the apathy
or timidity of the Tories - very little was spoken or written "to
oppose the torrent of the reformers". It is a tribute to the per-
ceived influence of the press that it was feared and deplored by a
wide range of Tories; during the Queen Caroline crisis, for example,
George IV considered that public opinion had been manufactured in a
gullible people by the press and other "collateral engines". Canning,
however, cleverly turned things on their head, and argued that the
success which an increasingly well-informed and organized public
opinion enjoyed in getting itself listened to, obviated any need
for change. Arguably, however, papers spent most of their energy
preaching to the converted - a German observer in 1835 commented that:

"Every newspaper has its own spectacles and represents the
colour which objects appear to it as the only true one;
while readers attach themselves with violent partiality
to one of this or that tinge..."  

It may be that, as contemporaries alleged, papers sought rather to
follow than lead public opinion. As *Fraser's Edinburgh Magazine*
put it in 1831, "A hosier will manufacture the stocking that sells.
It is none of his business to direct the community to wear cotton in
preference to worsted, or silk in preference to both". Yet, if
current research suggests that the main influence of the press in a
politically advanced society lies in the reinforcement of existing
attitudes and opinions, rather than in the forming of opinion, in
the context of the early nineteenth century this begs the question
of the definition of politically advanced. With fewer sources of information to draw upon, it was from provincial newspapers that many readers would have chiefly derived their sense of the outside world. What is certain is that the power of the press in the early nineteenth century was widely and often proclaimed, and that by a process of elision the voice of the press came to be seen as the voice of public opinion. This was famously avowed by Brougham in Parliament:

"Why, my lords, does the public press exercise so great an influence?... It is because the press echoes the public will, because it is the organ of public opinion that it is influential: and as it opposes itself to the public will, and as public opinion finds another organ to vent its sentiments, the press loses its influence." (37)

There was a widespread conviction among active local and national politicians that editorial support was an invaluable political asset. The most common reason for establishing a provincial paper was a perceived lack of journalistic support for a political or religious viewpoint. Reform newspapers in Newcastle, Bristol and York, fallible, prejudiced, and impressionistic as they often were, provided an invaluable campaigning and publicity arm for the activities of the liberal middle classes.

Of the Newcastle newspapers in the early nineteenth century, hitherto the bulk of attention has been given to the radical Tyne Mercury. Its editor from 1815, W.A. Mitchell, became a well-known figure on Tyneside. He was a particularly effective critic of the unreformed corporation of Newcastle and wrote a series of vigorous letters under the pseudonym 'Tim Tunbelly' detailing a variety of local abuses, which were published in the paper in 1822-23. Mitchell spoke at many meetings in favour of parliamentary reform in 1831-32 and was for a time an active member of the Northern Political Union before an acrimonious parting of the ways. Dr. Milne has interestingly delineated the evolving political line of the paper particularly in relation to parliamentary reform, from 1802-1848, and there is no doubting the Tyne Mercury's influence in certain quarters. For example, Robert Blakey, a young Morpeth radical, and friends who included a wheelwright and a roper ("ardent reformers of a very advanced school") clubbed together in about 1817 to take in the London Examiner, the Tyne Mercury and Cobbett's Political Register, and Blakey opened up a correspondence with the Mercury which he described enthusiastically as "a paper of an ultra-Reform complexion..." (39)
Overall, however, it can be argued that Milne both exaggerates the uniqueness of the Mercury's political stance and overestimates its appeal. Unlike the other Newcastle papers it was published on a Tuesday, and Milne adds:

"The Mercury differed from its rivals in more important respects than its time of publication. It set out to be a newspaper of comment, voicing its own opinions, or the opinions of contributors, rather than merely digesting the contents of London newspapers." (40)

This is to diminish the admittedly more sober, but nevertheless much more weighty and influential judgements and opinions periodically expressed in the Newcastle Chronicle. There is evidence that several individuals and groups found it difficult to take the Mitchell brothers seriously (H.A. Mitchell was a reporter on the paper). The Northern John Bull, for example, a popular satirical magazine aimed at the freemen, ridiculed the Mitchell's for their self-importance:

"Nothing can be more amusing to a man of sense than to read one of the Mercury's leading articles: the lectures he weekly gives to whoever happens to be our premier, the dignity with which he lashes and directs the different states of Europe, the solemn events which he foretells and has foretold, are all given with as much seeming consciousness of universal attention as if the whole world was actually cocking its ear".

There are similarities between W.A. Mitchell and Charles Dickens' fictional Mr. Pott, self-important editor of the Eatanswill Gazette. The Northern John Bull further charged that the paper was prepared to follow "any way for the road to lucre". This echoed The Corporation Mirror of 1829 which claimed to owe its existence to the fact that 'Tim Tunbelly' had laid down his pen, and that the Tyne Mercury had blunted the cutting edge of its criticism of the corporation in order that the paper could receive the corporation's advertisements. Similarly, during the enormously expensive and bitter 1826 Northumberland election, it was strongly suspected that the paper had ceded all of its independence and hired itself out as a vehicle for the candidature of T.W. Beaumont. Milne's own figures show that the circulation of the Mercury in the 1830's was considerably less than that of its rivals, and R.W. Hetherington, in an historical retrospect published in the Newcastle Weekly Chronicle in 1883, noted that the Mercury "never obtained the circulation or influence of its contemporaries". On occasions W.A. Mitchell tended to be too close to, and too actively involved in, many of the local political events he was describing, for him to foster the necessary distance and perspective. The Hodgsons, on the other hand, the
conductors of the *Newcastle Chronicle* were quiet, unassuming men, who did not mix with outsiders in the movements agitating public opinion "but they were assiduous in the quiet recess of their office, directing and enlightening the public mind with their pens." 

Solomon Hodgson (1760-1800) took over the management of the *Newcastle Chronicle* from Thomas Slack in 1784 having earlier married his master's daughter Sarah. In the 1790's, the *Newcastle Chronicle* did political service in the whig course by slanting its presentation of the news, taking its material from the quality opposition London newspapers, and publicizing the political activities of prominent local 'Friends of the People' such as Charles Grey and W.H.Lambton. A friend recommended the *Chronicle* to the Rev.Christopher Wyvill in 1794 as run by, "a man... very firm to the cause of liberty and Reform and... not to be dismayed at the threats that are constantly made to intimidate him." After his death, Sarah Hodgson conducted the family printing business together with the newspaper, with the help of John Bell, a brother-in-law. James Losh described her as "a woman of very strong and vigorous understanding" and admired her ability to conduct the *Newcastle Chronicle* so successfully, whilst at the same time bringing up seven children respectably, having been left with them when they were only very young and with scanty financial means to support them:

"Her paper has always been conducted upon better and more consistent whig principles than the leaders themselves of that party exhibited." (45)

When Sarah Hodgson's son Thomas came of age in 1806 he took over the editorial side of the paper whilst her fourth child James assumed control of the financial affairs of the business in 1814. There are indications in the small amount of Sarah Hodgson's surviving correspondence that she possessed a hard-headed sense of financial priorities. She noted, for example, in a letter to James in January 1811, "I am glad you think we cut a dash every week with our private correspondence - but don't you think we look very well in the advertising line, seldom less than a hundred", and wrote to the same son in May 1813, "we have got very well through so far and surely Thomas must approve of the paper it is so full of the Bible Society etc. - however the most of it is paid for". A letter from John Hodgson, however, addressed to his brothers following Sarah Hodgson's death in October 1822 shows how parlous the family's financial circumstances were. There was some doubt as to whether the paper would be able to continue
although John felt "a sort of filial affection to it and should not like to see it out of the family". The Hodgsons had to sell their family home to pay off their debts. From St. Petersburg John advised rationalization:

"I think a great part of the difficulty which we have experienced has arisen from want of management or I should say perhaps too great liberality".

In his opinion savings could be made in the wages bill of £3 a week and he advocated getting rid of the unprofitable parts of the business such as bookselling and binding, and realizing the money locked up in them to extend the printing business. He agreed to give up his shares to his brothers. From this inauspicious start, however, the two unmarried brothers built up the business and remained as owners, editors and managers of the Newcastle Chronicle until the end of December 1849 when, on account of "declining health and failing energies" they sold it to Messrs. M.W. Lambert, T. Bourne and J.B. Langhorne. Together, Thomas and James Hodgson made the Newcastle Chronicle arguably "the leading political organ between York and Edinburgh". They held moderate, reformist views in politics and religion, were strong supporters, as their father had been, of Parliamentary Reform, and were members of the influential unitarian congregation in Hanover Square. John Latimer wrote of Thomas in his Local Records published in 1857:

"His editorial labours were marked throughout that protracted period [1806-1849] by the kindliest feelings; the asperity of party was unknown to him, and amidst all the excitement of political strife he maintained a high tone of gentlemanly feeling". (49)

James, unlike his brother, entered public life, being elected a councillor in 1835 and shortly afterwards being made an Alderman. He was elected Mayor in 1841-42 and 1851-52 and was Chairman of the corporation Finance Committee for over a decade from 1844.

In many respects the Newcastle Chronicle was the official whig newspaper in the North-East with particularly close ties to the Grey family. On at least two key occasions involving prominent local whigs, every effort was made to ensure that the Chronicle published the 'correct' version of events. Upon the resignation of Lord Grey as Prime Minister in July 1834, his son Lord Howick wrote to James Hodgson commenting that:

"as it is very desirable that you should have an accurate account of what has recently happened I sent you our only
And following Lord Durham's resignation from the whig cabinet in March 1833, James Losh reassured him,

"As soon as I came to Newcastle this morning I sent for Hodgson... and he has undertaken to insert in his paper a full account from The Times..." (50)

Lord Grey, in particular, tended to receive very favourable treatment by the Chronicle; in declaring support for Lord Howick at the 1826 Northumberland election, for example, the paper's editorial column declared that:

"The house of Grey has claims, in our opinion, on every Englishman, which we should be ashamed if we did not feel and were not ready at all times to acknowledge".

And in 1831 the Hodgsons admitted that they were generally associated in public opinion with Grey and professed to be honoured by the connexion and exultant that he had finally secured a position of power.\(^{51}\)

The leanings of the Newcastle Chronicle could also be seen in smaller ways as when, for its readers information, the paper reproduced in January 1821 a keynote speech that Grey had made in the House of Lords in 1810 on the State of the Nation, or when it carried a highly favourable parliamentary sketch from the Examiner newspaper in October 1823.\(^{52}\) John Latimer, the subsequent compiler of key events in Bristol's history in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, was a journalist who had worked on the Newcastle Chronicle before moving to Bristol to become editor of the Bristol Mercury.

He wrote to James Hodgson in July 1864 with respect to "the political policy pursued by Earl Grey (& I may add the Newcastle Chronicle) from 1806 to the close of George the Fourth's reign". He noted a recent spate of published correspondence and books relating to the period which had appeared, and encouraged Hodgson to correct the version of events that was being established, presumably by reference to the files of the Newcastle Chronicle:

"to the best of my knowledge, not only is there not one book which supports the policy of Lord Grey, but that nine tenths of them speak of that policy with the strongest censure. his depreciatory tone is continually becoming more vehement, and I feel certain that any young man in search of information respecting the 24 years in question must unavoidably and infallibly receive a bias from the only authorities he can consult".

Not a single admirer of Grey had offered a word in his defence and
the work of his son General Grey had become "a new weapon in the hands of his father's enemy", by highlighting an excessive attachment to his family circle and drawing into question Grey's motivation for refusing office in 1812 and 1827. Hodgson's response to the letter is unknown, but that Latimer could make such suggestion is a significant indication of the relationship between the Newcastle Chronicle and the Grey family. 53

The Hodgsons, however, took considerable pride in the avowed independence of the Newcastle Chronicle, and not being an uncritical lap-dog. The Chartist newspaper, the Northern Liberator charged in February 1838 that "The Chronicle has always shown itself a ready and willing servant to its masters. It is bound to Downing St., by the tenderest sympathies". This was unfair, but it did prove more difficult for the paper to maintain a truly independent line once the whigs were actually in power in the 1830's. James Hodgson attested that the paper never contained, "a leader, or any political, electioneering, or controversial article, purporting to express the sentiments of the editor that was not written either by his late brother or himself". This he argued was a proof of independence - the sentiments expressed were their own and their columns were never under the influence or control of any individual or party. 54 On more than one occasion the paper addressed the question of independence squarely and directly. They did not disown the label 'whig' but argued that the Newcastle Chronicle was never a party tool and that the paper was not blind to the whigs' errors and defects - "Though attached to men, we are not devoted to them. The country is our party; its welfare our only object". 55 This fine rhetoric might have been supported by pointing to editorial positions that were adopted in 1819 and 1827. On the former occasion, in the wake of events at St. Peter's Field, Manchester, the paper adopted the role of candid friend to the whig leadership and spiritedly sought to articulate the sentiments of the North-East liberal middle classes whilst at the same time chiding them for their timidity. The Hodgsons recognized that there was "a wide difference between the whiggism of middle life and the whiggism of upper life", and sent a brave and potentially unpalatable message to local aristocratic and gentlemen whigs:

"If the whig leaders do not now come manfully forward... openly and decidedly profess themselves the friends of reform, and make known to what extent they are ready to
support it, they may rest assured, that they will as certainly lose the support of the middle ranks as they have already lost that of the lower".

The Chronicle no more minced its words to the region's middle classes. If they refused to make any public declarations, but confined themselves to mere private expressions of their dissatisfaction, how was it possible that their political friends could know their sentiments? "They have been so long accustomed to act under the guidance of the upper ranks... are so fearful of imputations of vulgarity, or want of respectability, if they should venture to act without them... that they have almost lost the power of acting for themselves". What struck a wide cross-section of individuals in 1819-20 was the divided nature of society, and there was a widespread pessimism as to future prospects. James Losh, for example, confided to his diary:

"The country seems in a most alarming state - the lower orders miserable and discontented - the whole middle rank of society (by far the most valuable) persuaded of the necessity of reform and economy, but so worn down by taxes and listless as not to seem capable of much exertion, and the higher classes, with few exceptions, selfish and profligate".

The editors of the Newcastle Chronicle resolutely nailed their colours to the mast at this point and expressed loudly and clearly what many individuals were saying in private. 56

In 1827, the Newcastle Chronicle, unlike Lord Grey, supported a coalition under Canning as Prime Minister. Most of the whig opposition, including leading figures such as Lansdowne, Tierney and Holland, were eager for power and willing, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, to follow Brougham in accepting almost any terms in order not "to throw open again the cabinet to the ultra-Tories". As Lambton put it, since the King would never accept a purely whig ministry:

"the only rational hope... is in a government so formed as not to irritate his or the country's prejudices, or excite their alarms at innovations, and with a tendency to encourage not resist, the general call for liberal principles". (57)

The Chronicle expressed satisfaction that several whigs were coming into power - "as warm partisans it is natural that we should feel gratification at such elevation of our political friends". 58 Grey's refusal to consider joining a coalition government was based upon a
combination of personal dislike and disdain for Canning's social background, principled opposition to taking office without guarantees on the issues of Catholic Emancipation and Parliamentary Reform, and a dislike of the very idea of coalition with the inevitable compromises that it entailed. Grey had some allies such as Althorp and a group of other 'young whigs' and Lord John Russell, who described the secession to Canning as "a negligent and unnecessary sacrifice of our importance as a party", but his position generally left him isolated for the brief period of Canning's premiership. 59 "I am left nearly alone, being separated from almost all my old friends, including Lambton", he wrote to his son Charles. There was some truth in Sir Thomas Lethbridge's claim in the House of Commons that Canning had "succeeded in un-Torying Toryism and un-Whiggism", and this had its effect on the editorial line of several reform-minded newspapers which tended to soften their position, at least temporarily, on the immediate need for parliamentary reform. The Newcastle Chronicle had responded positively to the more liberal Toryism, recognizing progress in several areas and pronouncing, for example, in favour of Huskisson's commercial policies, whilst praising speeches by Canning on the Catholic question, and Peel's legal reforms. 61 There was some recognition from the editors in early 1828, however, when the whigs re-united that they may have misread events in the previous year - "The few whigs who were in power were not exactly those we would choose as the guardians of whig principles or honour". They had proved too few in number to have much influence and their presence in the government had provided a hostage to fortune. 62

Overall, the Newcastle Chronicle contributed to the success of the reform cause in the North-East in many ways, but there are perhaps four aspects of its content in the years up to 1832 that are worth drawing attention to in particular. The paper was a consistent force for unity and co-operation among reformers, retained a perpetual optimism by its selection of material, drew attention to welcome developments elsewhere in the country, and gave detailed coverage to local initiatives and meetings. A keynote editorial advocated reform as early as June 1810; The people paid £70 million in taxes for which they deserved representation, and reform would render revolution unnecessary. The paper rarely advocated a specific line and tended to avoid the issue of the precise details of reform which it would support - "The question of the superiority
of the several plans of reform is a very fit subject of discussion among the several classes of reformers, but in all joint attempts to obtain the object of their wishes this question should be avoided". The opposition's accession of strength after the 1818 General Election led not only to calls for ministers to be more responsive to popular feeling but for "concert and unanimity" among the different sections of reformers. In October 1821 it referred to "the unnatural estrangement which has taken place between the several classes of society" and regularly spoke out against a breakdown in social harmony and in favour of "the cordial union of all ranks". The Newcastle Chronicle succeeded, even in quieter times, in giving an impression of improvement and progress. During the mid 1820's editorial comment rarely referred to local events and usually led with foreign news. The agenda was set by Westminster which often led to a dry, formal discussion of the main points in dispute. There was little, however, to get excited about and Lord Grey could complain that the state of the country was:

"as dull and monotonous as anything can well be considered to be. There is no public question which excites, no public feeling which produces any sympathy, no public prospects which can engage one in future speculations". (65)

Yet the Chronicle managed to remain cheerful. In February 1824 the paper could comment that "unfortunately those who took an interest in politics tended to feel depressed if events did not take the desired turn at the precise moment wished for", but this view it argued was superficial - change was a gradual process but it was occurring.

An attempt was made on all occasions to see events as flowing in a productive direction. One way to give an impression of momentum was to draw attention to noteworthy speeches, articles, or meetings elsewhere, in order both to enlighten local opinion and encourage local activity. The paper published extracts, for example, from 'Lord Erskine's Short Defence of the Whigs' (1819), Walter Fawkes letter 'To the Nobility, Gentry, Clergy and Freeholders of Yorkshire on the Question of Reform' (1822), and a speech by the Reverend Sydney Smith to a meeting of the East Riding clergy at Beverley supporting the Catholic claims (1825). Of the meeting that Fawkes convened in Yorkshire in August 1822 the Chronicle commented that, "it is sincerely to be hoped that these proceedings will not be suffered to pass unsupported, but that other districts and other
classes of society, will in like manner declare themselves." The editors further encouraged the people of Newcastle to follow the example of manufacturing towns such as Manchester, Leeds and Bradford in 1825 which had held meetings and organized petitions calling for a revision of the Corn Laws. Widespread publicity was given not only to important set-piece occasions such as the Newcastle Fox dinners (see above p.26) but also to political dinners that occurred elsewhere in the country, particularly in Scotland.

Such events offered encouragement to reformers elsewhere. Conversely, the Chronicle sought to spread local initiatives outwards, commenting of an 1820 Newcastle reform petition, "it were to be wished that other towns had followed the example set them by the meeting from which the petition emanated". Major local public meetings received considerable coverage. The paper singled out the enormous meeting of thousands of working people on the Town Moor in October 1819 following the 'Peterloo Massacre' as memorable and epoch-making:

"assuming that this is merely a counterpart of the situation of other districts, numbers of the temperate inhabitants of this town feel convinced that if some concessions are not made by the government, the consequences may be most unfortunate". (69)

Meeting reports were an important element in the formation and direction of opinion - there was a symbolic relationship between the press and the platform. Speeches at meetings concerning themselves with Parliamentary Reform, the proceedings against Queen Caroline, and Catholic Emancipation were printed verbatim, as far as possible, and newspapers elsewhere used the reports as the basis for their own shorter accounts. The paper provided a sterling service in the years 1830-32, a period of almost perpetual agitation and activity. It viewed the recall of Grey in 1832 following the 'Days of May', as the successful outcome of public demonstration.

Thomas Headlam could write to Lord Durham in May 1833,

"In this district the Newcastle Chronicle has done an important service by the vigorous and correct manner in which it has maintained sound opinions and so ably defended the measures of Lord Grey". (72)
but the service which the Chronicle provided in aid of the whig cause was less highly rated only a few years later. Part of the problem was that all the qualities which the Hodgson brothers could legitimately claim characterized their paper when they finally took leave of their readers - sincerity, courtesy, forbearance to opponents, toleration, and a desire to preserve their columns from the contamination of private slander and public calumny - could in another light be viewed as weaknesses and symptoms of complacency.

The arrival of the Newcastle Journal in May 1832, with its aggressive, sharp-toned editorials, as an avowed party organ of the Tories, brought a new bitterness to North-East politics. As R.W.Hetherington subsequently wrote of the whigs:

"They were not in possession of the like ordnance, even if they had an equal amount of powder and shot. Their great gun, the Newcastle Chronicle was under the command and control of an officer who manfully refused the use of it for such a service". (73)

The Journal sniped effectively at Grey family 'jobbery', sought to diminish the activities of the Northern Political Union and highlight divisions among radical leaders, and regularly crossed swords with Lord Durham. In December 1834 it described the Chronicle as being "supine and drowsy upon matters of local politics, in exact proportion as the public mind is awakened and excited by events of commanding interest", whilst by April 1838 the Journal could comment of the whig cause that "their 'public instructor' is regarded by their stoutest partisans as one of the feeblest and most inefficient party organs in the kingdom".74 There was a strong element of truth in this latter charge, with the paper's unwillingness to declare itself wholeheartedly in favour of the 'Durham' principles as proclaimed in October 1834, being held against it by several prominent local whigs. When Headlam heard of the government's proposed reduction of the stamp duty in 1836, he wrote again to Lord Durham in anticipation of the effects that this would produce in the provincial press, in order to consider how the changes could be rendered most beneficial in the North-East:

"This town is increasing so much in trade and population and local importance that a paper might be circulated there twice a week provided it was steady in its politics and arranged and spirited in its execution. The Chronicle
is an excellent groundwork for such a speculation but I fear much they cannot be roused to it. If they will not exert themselves to avail themselves of the opportunity of satisfying the increased demand for local and general news, it will be necessary to commence some new undertaking upon a respectable foundation to keep the business out of [improper]hands". (75)

Headlam's disappointment with the Chronicle prefigured a falling out in local politics a few months later. James Hodgson refused to join the whig 'clique' prior to the first municipal elections of November 1836 - an inner circle initially composed of Headlam, Bigge, John Fife, R.P. Philipson, Emerson Charnley, James Losh (Jnr.) and Charles Lorraine. They were reported to have been much annoyed at Hodgson heading the poll in St. John's Ward, with more votes than any other councillor, after he refused to join their caucus meetings in the backroom of Charnley's bookshop. According to the anonymous, but well-informed, author of The Corporation Annual, "they did their utmost to keep him out of his aldermanship but the council thought otherwise and he was elected". 76 Lord Durham's agent Henry Morton was more scathing in his description of the "unfortunate situation" in which the liberal cause in the North-East was placed by the "apathy" and "incapacity" of their press - "Such an influential district as the town of Newcastle and the banks of the Tyne and Wear, not possessing an able and talented liberal newspaper, reflects great discredit upon the activity of the liberal party". Three newspapers advocated good doctrines - the Durham Chronicle, Sunderland Herald, and Tyne Mercury - but possessed "no influence whatever, from the circumstance of their circulations being so limited":

"as for the Newcastle Chronicle it is an emasculated liberal, feeble and indolent to a celebrated degree - it has a large circulation and might in good hands be made immediately and highly influential in disseminating liberal doctrines".

Morton favoured a plan to buy the Chronicle from the Hodgson brothers, by raising money through a share issue, and finding a good editor "to advocate the principles of Lord Durham". He was persuaded that if the scheme could be established on fair terms, "the liberal cause would soon again be triumphant". 77 Lord Durham himself preferred the idea of re-launching an established paper to setting up a new press in Gateshead, but the Hodgson brothers, after entering into negotiations, refused to sell, and the Gateshead Observer was established in November 1837, initially under the control of...
W. H. Brockett. The paper was favoured with government advertise-
ments and a great deal of advice from William Hutt, M.P. for Hull,
and Lord Durham, although he was "averse to do any act by which he
could be implicated as a party in the concern". For all of its
problems in the 1830's, however, the Newcastle Chronicle outlived a
host of other reform and radical papers such as the Tyne Mercury,
Northern Liberator, Newcastle Press (1833-34), and Newcastle Standard
(1836-37) and survived competition from the Newcastle Journal and a
resurgent Newcastle Courant. The paper had an effective distribution
network which extended into Cumberland and Yorkshire, as well as
Northumberland and Durham, and kept pace with new inventions and
printing techniques which led to clearer type and enlarged pages.
The reduction of the stamp duty in 1836 had led to a weekly increase
of 600 copies - over 25% on its former circulation - and the
Chronicle continued to outsell and make life difficult for the
Gateshead Observer, much to the chagrin of the likes of Hutt who wrote
of Newcastle papers in general, but the Chronicle in particular, "I
know that they are long established concerns and have in consequence a
stronger corps d'armée - but we must improve the Observer". The
Hodgson family were, and remained, a highly influential force on
Tyneside for well over half a century.

The three leading newspapers at York in the early nineteenth
century were all established in the first instance as political
rather than commercial concerns. The York Herald was established,
after a period of gestation, in 1790. The city's whig M.P., Sir
William Milner, considered it absolutely necessary to have a paper
at York and noted in a letter to Earl Fitzwilliam that "if all our
enemies' publications are to be printed and ours refused we fight
an unequal battle". Plans had been drawn up by February 1789 for a
newspaper at York to "act as an antidote against the poison that has
been so profusely distributed throughout the county by the present
prints of the town". The prospective editors expected no financial
aid, but felt that the only way to establish a large circulation was
to supply every public house in the county with a year's free sub-
scription, and have gentlemen of fortune in the whig interest direct
their stewards, attornies, and legal agents to give the new paper
their advertisements. Free distribution in fact ceased in May 1790
after five months and cost just over £141; according to one of the
Herald's early editors this was "a cheap price for the excellent
work it was doing for York whigs". Similarly, both the tory
Yorkshire Gazette and the Liberal Yorkshireman were founded, in 1819 and 1834 respectively, for political purposes and were funded by joint stock companies. Two hundred men subscribed a capital of £10,000 to establish the Yorkshireman which was intended to be "a liberally conducted local paper, unencumbered by the trammels of party, bound down to no set of men or code of opinions".82

In November 1831 a dinner was held in honour of William Hargrove to celebrate his appointment as a Sheriff of York, and the York Herald was strongly praised by George Strickland, one of Yorkshire's M.P.s and Lord Dundas, who was presiding in 1831 as the city's Mayor. Strickland described the press as "the organ through which the progress of public opinion is made known" and noted reports that Lord Wharncliffe, a leading Tory peer was travelling around the country in a stage coach to ascertain the state of public opinion. He added that,

"...he might learn much more upon that subject by an easier method - by reading sometimes both sides of the question - by sitting quietly at home and perusing Mr. Sheriff Hargrove's journal from which he could, at any time, for many years back, have accurately have learned the feelings and wishes of the country respecting reform, peace, retrenchment, and economy." (83)

After assuming the ownership of the York Herald in June 1813, Hargrove had gradually introduced a harder edged political journalism, attempting to encourage the establishment of a Fox Club in York for example, agitating against the Property Tax, and ridiculing poorly attended Pitt dinners.84 The partisanship of York newspapers became even more marked at times of political excitement such as 1817-20 and the 1830's. Some editorials adopted a tone of reformist euphoria; in January 1819, for example, Hargrove commented,

"We cannot but congratulate the public on the increase of patriotic sentiment in this city and we trust the spirit of freedom will quickly spread far and wide, through the whole both of this and every neighbouring county, till REFORM in parliament shall be resolutely demanded from every part of the Kingdom". (85)

Hargrove was editor and proprietor of the paper from 1813-1862 and from 1820 also owned the York Courant. He was an enthusiastic supporter of parliamentary reform and was active in all Whig-Radical associations between 1817 and 1834. He was a Vice President not only of the York Whig Club but also of the subsequent York City and County Reform Association, chairing a meeting in October 1831, and he helped to found the York Society for the Diffusion of Political
Knowledge (Y.S.D.P.K.) in 1835. He spoke regularly at reform meet-
ings, although his speeches tended towards the melodramatic. At a
meeting after the Bill of Pains and Penalties had been dropped
against Queen Caroline in November 1820, for example, Hargrove
exclaimed:

"What... have Ministers done? They have built a few
churches and got parsons to them. They have built barracks,
they have drained the purses of the poor, they brought a
poor, innocent Queen to be tried, and would have placed
her on the scaffold if they could. Their nefarious deeds
are written in blood in every part of Europe; they have
raised mountains of misery, and caused rivers of tears to
flow from the eyes of widows and orphans". (86)

He was also active within the corporation, serving, for example,
on a committee which oversaw the construction of a new cattle market,
and on the Board of Health established to fight the cholera epi-
demic in 1831. In November 1836 Tait's Edinburgh Magazine recorded
that,

"The York Herald is a paper of prodigious size, published
on the market day, and an exceedingly prosperous journal.
In respect of both circulation and advertisements it
has risen, within a few weeks, from about 2,000 to
nearly 3,000 copies - a proof of Liberalism in York which
we accept with peculiar satisfaction".

This was shortly after the reduction of the Stamp Duty and at about this
time the Herald claimed more than double the circulation of the two
Conservative newspapers, the York Chronicle and the Yorkshire Gazette com-
bined. Hargrove claimed that, "the combined interests of the
Landowner, the Agriculturist, the Manufacturer, and the Tradesman
shall be our constant care", and he sought to keep up with technol-
genous innovations. In August 1831 he invested £1,000 in a Napier
printing machine which meant that the number of papers able to be
printed in an hour increased from 250 to 1,000, as well as allowing
an additional column of each page and lengthier columns. In effect
the enlargement equalled the addition of one complete page of the
old paper, and allowed for greater space for correspondence, com-
mercial reports, agricultural intelligence, horse-racing news, and
editorial comment.

Yet if the support given by the York Herald to reform issues
before 1832 was impressive, William Hargrove's liberal credentials
were compromised in the late 1830's and early 1840's. By 1838 the
Herald had deserted its traditional allegiance and had become a
supporter of George Hudson, the influential Tory Mayor of York and future 'Railway King'.\textsuperscript{90} Hargrove was accused of "acting for the gratification of parties who by patronage of advertisements now controlled the paper"\textsuperscript{91} and the \textit{Herald} opposed both the application of the New Poor Law to Yorkshire and the repeal of the Corn Laws. Hargrove's political conduct was increasingly seen as being tainted by mercenary instincts and a desire for printing orders, although his concern for the financial well-being of his business had been apparent well before 1838. As early as December 1821 a correspondent in the \textit{Yorkshire Gazette} had pointed out that whilst Hargrove stuck to whig views in the \textit{Herald}, "for the purpose of sale, he now and then dips a 'little blue' in the \textit{Courant} and always in the latter paper professes the purely 'Independent' colour". In June 1834 'A Freeman' hinted strongly that Hargrove's political affiliation could be swayed by the distribution of printing jobs and that he "could never be produced at the poll by any party until an enormous quantity of that soothing unction had been administered", and the same accusation was made during the 1835 election contest. In 1839 the \textit{Yorkshireman} claimed that the \textit{York Courant} was sympathetic to the People's charter in order to try to preserve circulation amongst West Riding Chartists.\textsuperscript{92} The establishment of the liberal \textit{Yorkshireman} in March 1834 indicated a Whig-Liberal split in the city. Hargrove regarded its establishment as a personal betrayal:

"... commenced to gratify personal spleen, it has been conducted in a spirit of mischievous malignity... and has divided a political party".

The \textit{Yorkshireman}, however, justified its establishment thus:

"It was originally called into existence in consequence of the fact that there was no newspaper in this city that possessed the confidence and advocated the views of that important body, THE LIBERAL PARTY... It has never exhibited a willingness to desert the cause with which it has been embarked, nor, like the weathercock \textit{Herald}, veered about with every changing wind. (93)

A group of whigs in York, initially headed by R.H. Anderson, had been furious at Hargrove's policy in the 1832 election when he had supported Thomas Dundas and Samuel Bayntun, and not Edward Petre. Most of the shareholders of the \textit{Yorkshireman} had voted for Petre not Bayntun, but their general allegiance to the whig party was an even more important factor.\textsuperscript{94}

There were several examples of Hargrove's pique, as the mid
1830's saw a period of bitter internecine rivalry. Hargrove voted against admitting reporters to meetings of York Improvement Commissioners, of which body he was a member, so as to exclude the Yorkshireman, and in April 1837 altered the copy of a court reporter in order to slander the rival newspaper. He also ceased to support the Y.S.D.P.K. in 1835 after Leonard Simpson, one of the principal shareholders of the Yorkshireman had appeared at a meeting, which paper reported "from that time he has done his utmost to crush the society and blacken the politics of its members". Sales of the Herald and Courant seem to have suffered a relative decline in the late 1830's which would account for their hostility towards the Yorkshireman as it seemed to be rapidly catching up under the vigorous management of R.R.Pearce. The Yorkshireman had not been without its own financial and managerial problems in the late 1830's which Hargrove had been eager to publicize, but Pearce claimed to have lifted the circulation from 600 to 2,000-3,000 by the early 1840's. Thus, through a combination of competition and a desire to retain the patronage of Hudson's tory corporation, the Herald moved to the right in its politics, and the sincerity of this conversion can be questioned since the paper rapidly reverted to its former liberalism after the fall of Hudson in the late 1840's. Newspapers at York, as at Newcastle and Bristol, were in themselves an integral part of a partisan political culture which could even lead to the exchange of physical blows. In 1839 a York Liberal Association Dinner ended in acrimony after the toast of "R.R.Pearce, editor of the Yorkshireman", was given. Supporters of the rival Herald jeered and booed to the extent that one of them was challenged to a duel by Pearce!

Bristol, too, was the centre for a flourishing weekly press; by the early 1830's all the established weeklies had achieved healthy sales of over 2,000 copies a week and were voraciously perused in taverns and clubrooms. The city's newspapers have been the subject of more than one scholarly study, and were also the object of contemporary analysis. The relative success of newspapers maintaining differing political stances was taken to be a barometer of the city's opinion by outside observers. Thus the Westminster Review in 1830 saw the success of the Bristol Mercury as "a proof that all the Bristolians certainly are not opposed to the diffusion of correct opinions", and Tait's Edinburgh Magazine commented favourably in December 1836 on the sales of
each of Bristol's liberal newspapers. It argued, admittedly from a radical perspective, that "the state of the Bristol press shows what progress Liberalism is making in that city". It had been a talented tory editor J.M. Gutch who in 1811 first initiated original editorial comment in Bristol in Felix Farley's Bristol Journal. He was the author of a notable series of letters signed 'Cosmo' between 5 October 1822 and 19 April 1823 which dealt critically with every aspect of the management of the port of Bristol. Later, he was a leading advocate of the Provincial Newspaper Society established in 1836 and became its first President. In contrast, the liberal Bristol Mercury was an ailing newspaper in 1818, with a weekly circulation of only about 300. It was sold for £600 to a group of seven liberal proprietors who planned to meet monthly in order to manage the paper, and "the newspaper at once gave evidence that new blood had been put into it. It was enlarged by a widening of its columns, and at once began to publish leading articles, hitherto unknown to it". T.J. Manchee, a printer and bookseller soon became its controlling spirit, and was sole editor by the end of 1819 and sole proprietor by October 1823. The purchase and regeneration of the paper was considered important enough for a whig agent in the West Country to pass on to Lord Grey:

"I believe I neglected acquainting your Lordship that Moggridge has succeeded in establishing a whig paper in Bristol; after the election it was found that the Tories derived great strength from the whigs having no channel for their opinions to be communicated to the public". He reported that the main financial backing had come from Charles Elton, a Bristol banker, "who overlooks the editors and publishers" and was confident in October 1818 that "the good effects are already beginning to be felt". In January 1919 Moggridge forwarded the Mercury's leading articles to Lord Grey at Howick. His letter further confirms the importance which reformers placed upon having reliable and effective support in the press. He reported, "we were losing everything in Bristol, as I had long and painfully noticed", but concluded of the transformation of the Mercury that:

"The leading articles, the papers under the head "State of the Country' & c., and the letters of Aristides have excited vast attention, more than doubled the circulation of the paper, and are evidently effecting the public's opinion." (104)

That the paper explicitly sought to appeal to Bristol's liberal middle
classes was seen by the titles given to some of its early leading articles: "Superior Importance of Reform to the Middle Ranks of Society", "Emigration of the Middle classes, its cause and Remedy", "Effects of Taxation upon the Middle Classes of Society and upon Trade and Commerce". It was obviously in the paper's interests to use this umbrella concept loosely, and it caught many occupations in its net - "the mechanic, the tradesman, the farmer, the manufacturer, the yeoman, the merchant, and the country gentleman".  

By 1840 the Bristol Mercury was the leading newspaper in the West of England, but it did not achieve this position of pre-eminence under the editorship of Manchee, who was a better journalist than he was a businessman. The efforts of the paper to arouse apathetic whiggism in Bristol in the early 1820's have been described elsewhere, and Manchee could certainly claim credit for stimulating debate and raising reform awareness. He published a series of nine articles in 1819, for example, entitled 'Historical Review of the Progress of Public Opinion on Parliamentary Reform', and he reported on the efforts of reformers elsewhere in the country such as the Liverpool Concentric Society, and the Essex and Cheshire Whig Clubs. In November 1829, Manchee argued that "the Mercury was the first paper that made the local civic officers feel that there was such a thing in Bristol as public opinion". By this time, however, he had frankly confessed in an article that he was unsuccessful in the competition for advertisements which were the means by which papers survived:

"We may exercise our talents, we may direct our zeal, we may stimulate our industry; the only thing we may deserve, but cannot command, is—success!" (108)

The Mercury was further undermined by the success of the unstamped Bristolian, skilfully edited by James Acland, which sold at 1½d. and conducted small scale investigative journalism on local issues. Acland reported that the Mercury had been surviving on an average of only 20–25 advertisements, but by August 1829 this was down to less than 12. He brought a variety of charges against Manchee including local corruption and political inconsistency, claiming, for example, that Manchee's motive for "political tergiversation and editorial inconsistency" was a desire to ingratiate himself with the corporation and thus receive their advertisements. By November 1829 the lack of commercial success forced Manchee to sell. One of the problems that he had faced was a lack of access to key
corporation meetings and in 1828/29 the Mercury was excluded from those newspapers made available at the Council House.\textsuperscript{110}

Competition between newspapers for a limited market was quite fierce, and the Bristol Gazette was also pro-reform whig in its political stance, and ran regular editorials from 1817. John Mills, its editor from 1809, like Manchee, also figured prominently as a leader of public opinion in the city. At the key whig selection meeting of February 1812, for example, he spoke in favour of Romilly as the whig candidate to replace Evan Baillie in the election, and was a member of the Whig Anchor Society becoming President in 1834. He was a zealous advocate of parliamentary reform, frequently addressed meetings, and was elected as a Liberal councillor in November 1837, retaining his seat until his death in 1849.\textsuperscript{111} The Gazette's whiggism was compromised, however, by its close relationship with Bristol's tory corporation. Mills was invited by the Mayor to attend a ceremony at the Mansion House in January 1825 when the freedom of the city was conferred upon George Canning and Lord Liverpool whilst Manchee was pointedly excluded.\textsuperscript{112} The Gazette could later be accused of making "eternal shuffling excuses" for the "self-elected junta" at Bristol's Council House and of pandering to the Tories, the West India interests, and the corporation,\textsuperscript{113} and the Gazette's policies may well have contributed to its comparative decline in the 1830's. Yet whilst the Mercury naturally criticized the cosy arrangement between the Gazette and the corporation, the Mercury's own lack of establishment credibility may have damaged it in the eyes of its potential respectable readership. In a 'Farewell Address to his Readers', Manchee argued that he had "not met with that support which he has endeavoured to deserve". A libel action, in August 1823, after he published anonymous letters which called into question a military officer's courage and modesty, and then refused to reveal the identity of the author, had brought further adverse publicity.\textsuperscript{114}

W.H. Somerton assumed the management and editorship of the Mercury in 1829, which led to a shift in the paper's declared purpose. Whilst Somerton still aimed "to DIRECT the public mind", and to "ever maintain the liberal tone of our politics", his editorial line was more politically independent than that which Manchee had managed to achieve:

"We confess that the Mercury is, and will always be, a party paper - of the party of the people - but not a party tool". (115)
Whilst this was a standard claim, the paper largely managed to live up to it, and it proved to be an effective and astute strategy. Unlike Manchee, who was an habitual speaker at public meetings, Somerton did not enter public life as a political partisan or councillor, and he retained a perspective on Bristol and national politics in the 1830's that John Mills and J.B.Kington perhaps lost through their close involvement with the Bristol Liberal Association. In January 1837, for example, a balanced line was adopted by the Mercury when it considered a keynote political article by Sir William Molesworth, "Terms of Alliance between Radicals and Whigs". It considered that the article was too severe on the whigs but nevertheless called for "a vigorous system of policy" which included the Ballot and the abolition of church rates - "the conduct of ministers upon some questions may not have been fully satisfactory, but progress was still onward, although the enthusiasm that carried reform had died away".

Somerton also aimed to provide a family newspaper which appealed to a wider readership, and adopted a more formal and reserved tone; by September 1833 he claimed to have more than trebled the paper's circulation to over 1,000 copies per week. He switched the day of publication to Saturday so that it was "the only organ of the Liberal party published at the end of the week" in Bristol, and extended the paper's circulation through Somerset, South Wales, Gloucestershire, and other Western counties. Somerton also argued that the Mercury was more widely read than any of its contemporaries and stressed that its circulation was "confined to families of respectability and intelligence, to the substantial yeomanry of the adjoining counties, and to hotels, inns, and reading rooms of the first character", although these claims are obviously difficult to substantiate. He really made his name by providing the fullest and most comprehensive eye witness account of the Bristol riots, in October 1831, which provided the empirical basis of many subsequent analyses. Like Hargrove at York, Somerton sought to keep up with the latest technology and innovations; he bought a new Napier machine in May 1836 and in October 1839 the Mercury became one of the first provincial newspapers to double in size and change to eight pages with six columns on each page. By the end of the decade the parliamentary stamp returns indicated that the Mercury was the leading Bristol newspaper with a flourishing circulation throughout the West of England.

It was indicative of the power which contemporaries attributed to the press that the most popular tory account of the Bristol riots,
written by Reverend J. Eagles, could blame the events largely upon a sustained and deliberate campaign on the part of a liberal press which had "fearlessly encouraged and demanded violence" and which was "constantly issuing most inflammatory language". And in a pamphlet written in dialogue form after the riots a farmer was made to conclude that:

"these newspaper fellows do all this mischief for no better reason than these riots make people more fond of buying newspapers than they would else". (121)

These accusations were largely groundless, and papers like the Bristol Mercury kept as cool as possible in the circumstances, and dissociated respectable opinion from the violence, yet the fact that such charges could be brought at all was significant in itself. Like the Newcastle Chronicle, York Herald, and other influential liberal provincial newspapers, the Bristol Mercury acted as an advocate and catalyst for further reforms. On the question of the secret ballot in September 1837, for example, the paper asked:

"Why should the city of Bristol be behind her neighbours? We call upon our fellow citizens to discharge this one most important act of duty to themselves and to their country..."

In March 1840 on the Corn Laws the paper concluded that:

"action, energy, and unanimity ought to be the motto of our citizens. They must not look coldly and apathetically at each other and enquire 'what is to be done?'" (123)

A study of the liberal press in Newcastle, York, and Bristol bears out the point that liberal middle class reformers increasingly recognized the value of possessing a newspaper which both expressed their views, and propagated more widely selected events and meetings throughout the country that tended to show reformers in a positive light.
FOOTNOTES:


10. Liverpool Mercury 3 June 1814.


Birmingham and the West Midlands 1760-1800 (Manchester, 1977).


42. The Corporation Mirror I (1829) p. 3; Newcastle Chronicle 20 May 1826.


47. B.L. Add MSS 50240 J. (ohn) Hodgson to his brothers 29 Oct. 1822.


49. J. Latimer, Local Records; or Historical Record of Remarkable Events which have occurred in Northumberland and Durham, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne and Berwick-Upon-Tweed with Biographical Notices 1832-1857.

50. Hodgson MSS B.L. Add. MSS 50240 Lord Howick to James Hodgson 14 July 1834; Lambton MSS James Losh to Lord Durham 20 March 1833.


54. Northern Liberator 3 Feb 1831; Public Dinner to William Ord Esq., at the Assembly Rooms, Newcastle, 8 Sept. 1852 on his retirement from the Representation of Newcastle (Newcastle, 1852) pp. 3-4.


56. Ibid., 20 Nov. 1819, 27 Nov. 1819; E. Hughes (ed.) Losh I p. 104 2 Dec. 1819.


59. For Grey's position see Grey MSS Grey to Holland 14 April 1827, Grey to Fitzwilliam 18 April 1827, Russell to Grey 8 Sept. 1827.
The background to the complex political manoeuvring in these months is provided by A. Aspinall, (ed.) The Formation of Canning’s Ministry, February to August 1827, Camden Society, 3rd. Ser., LIX (1937); and Aspinall, 'The Coalition Ministries of 1827(i) Canning's Ministry,' English Historical Review XLII (1927) pp.201-226.


61. Newcastle Chronicle 2 April, 30 April, 30 July 1825. The Bristol Mercury likewise emphasized Canning's reformist credentials and supported those whigs who decided to join his administration.


63. Ibid., 23 June 1810, 1 Feb. 1823.

64. Ibid., 18 July 1818, 27 Oct. 1821.


67. Ibid., 20 March 1819, 3 Aug. 1822, 23 April 1825, 2 April 1825.


70. Ibid., e.g. 29 Jan. 1820, 13 Jan. 1821, 14 March 1829, 25 Dec. 1830.

71. Ibid., 26 May, 2 June 1832.

72. Lambton MSS Headlam to Durham 30 May 1833.


75. Lambton MSS Headlam to Durham 1 March 1836.

76. Anon., The Corporation Annual; or Recollections (Not Random) of the First Reformed Town Council... (Newcastle, 1836) p.9.


78. Ibid., William Hutt to Brockett 2 Aug. 1837, 22 Nov. 1837 Vol.VII f.319, 333. M. Milne (Northern History, 1978) refers to these discussions from the point of view of their effect upon the Tyne Mercury.

80. Tait's Edinburgh Magazine III (1836) p.688, Brockett MSS

81. Wentworth Woodhouse MSS Sir William Milner to Earl Fitzwilliam
n.d. [1788]; Robert Sinclair to Earl Fitzwilliam 2 Feb. 1789;
Thomas Wilson to Earl Fitzwilliam 22 May 1790.

82. Yorkshireman 29 March 1834. For the early history of the Yorkshire Gazette c.f. T.P. Cooper, "The Yorkshire Gazette; Evolution of the Journal from 1819 to To-day" in Centenary Supplement of the Yorkshire Gazette 1819-1919 [Y070].

83. York Herald 26 Nov. 1831.

84. Ibid., 12 Feb., 7 May 1813; 24 Dec.1814, 7 Jan 1815; 27 May 1815, 1 June 1816, 31 May 1817.

85. Ibid., 23 Jan. 1819.

86. Ibid., 18 Nov. 1820.

87. Ibid., 6 Sept.1862 (Hargrove's obituary notice); 3 Dec.1831.

88. Tait's Edinburgh Magazine III (1836) pp.685-686; York Herald
15 Oct.1835.


90. For Hudson see below p. 334 et.seq.


92. Yorkshire Gazette 22 Dec.1821; Yorkshireman 14 June 1834;
Yorkshire Gazette 13 Dec.1834; Yorkshireman 6 July 1839.


94. For a list of 20 of the leading shareholders c.f. York Herald
1 Oct. 1842.

95. Yorkshireman 23 Aug.1834, 8 April 1837, 1 Aug 1835. The Yorkshireman also recorded other examples of Hargrove's alleged petty spite e.g. 21 Nov.1835, 6 Aug. 1836.

96. For the Yorkshireman's problems c.f. York Herald 3 March 1838,

97. Yorkshire Gazette 6 April 1839.

98. "Under five monarchs - Bristol in the old days - veteran citizen reminisces" (extract from Bristol Mercury 1907 ? Bristol Ref. Library B3630); C.A.Elton, An Apology for Col.Hugh Baillie... (Bristol, 1819) p.4.

99. e.g. D.F.Gallop, Chapters in the History of the Provincial Newspaper Press 1700-1855 (M.A., University of Reading, 1956); A.P.Hart, The Bristol Riots and the mass media (D.Phil., Oxford, 1979). I am grateful to Dr.Hart for permission to cite his thesis. Older accounts include A.Allen and A.G.Powell, Bristol and its Newspapers.
(Bristol, 1934) and A.B.Beaven and E.R.Norris Matthews, "History of Bristol Journalism", Bristol Times and Mirror 1 Dec.1909.

100. Westminster Review XXIII Jan.1830 pp.75-76; Tait's Edinburgh Magazine III Nov.1836 p.689, Dec.1836 p.803. The short-lived Bristol Advocate claimed the highest circulation of any paper in the West of England (see below p.295), the Bristol Gazette claimed a 25% increase in circulation since the reduction of the stamp duty, whilst the Bristol Mercury had reportedly increased its weekly circulation from about 1,150 to over 1,850 and was receiving a great many more advertisements.


104. Ibid., J.H.Moggridge to Grey 15 Jan. 1819.


106. See above p. 107 for example.


108. Ibid., 9 Nov.1829, 15 Jan.1827.


110. e.g. Bristol Gazette 24 May 1827 - Manchee was refused permission to be present at a meeting of the Grammar School Trustees; Council Cash Book 1826-32 p.102 (Bristol Record Office); Bristol Mercury 29 Sept.1829.


115. **Bristol Mercury** 3 April 1832.


120. **Bristol Mercury** 21 May 1836; 19 Oct. 1839; Jefferies Collection IX p.156, 'The Leading Bristol Paper', a poster giving the parliamentary stamp returns for the three months ending 31 March 1839.


122. c.f. L. Carpenter, "On the Bristol Riots", *Monthly Repository* 4 1831 p. 842; the *Bristol Mercury* of 25 Oct. 1831 exhorted "all persons to use their influence to repress, on that occasion, [Wetherell's visit] the least appearance of disorder".

123. **Bristol Mercury** 9 Sept. 1837, 14 March 1840.
POLITICAL CONTENTION IN A WIDER URBAN CONTEXT: RELIGION, EDUCATION, CULTURE, AND CHARITY

Lord Durham, during the second reading of the Reform Bill in the House of Lords in April 1832, in a speech which ascribed the rise of reform feeling to "the great mass of the middle classes having at length identified themselves with this question", went on to observe:

"As for intelligence, look at the great towns of the Empire — Leeds, Manchester, Birmingham, Sheffield, Newcastle, Edinburgh, Glasgow and many others; and by whom will you find the scientific institutions, the literary associations, the charities — in short, all the associations tending to the advancement of the arts, literature, and science, and to the amelioration of the human kind — by whom will you find them supported? By whose example and purse maintained? The Middle Classes" (1)

In some respects the Reform Act can be represented as the logical political pay-off of over a century of provincial self-improvement. One can point in the eighteenth century to improvements in communications networks — turnpikes, canals, and post-roads — which facilitated the spread and exchange of information, the growth of a reading public in coffee houses and taverns, expanding educational provision, the transition among influential members of the 'political nation' from private to public entertainment, and a burgeoning provincial urban culture. 2 James Losh at Newcastle observed in September 1831 that "Kings and privileged orders must give way to increasing information just as witchcraft and astrology have already disappeared". 3 Samuel Nicoll, a leader of the York Whig Club, had argued in 1819 that the previous thirty years had produced a "complete alteration in the character of the people of England... something of learning has become universal amongst them; that learning is chiefly political. The character arising out of it is political". In such circumstances he considered it was absurd to expect the practice of government to remain uninfluenced and the constitution unaltered. 4 The impact of the spread of information and knowledge, taken together with the growth of evangelicalism over the same period, tended to create and encourage a questioning frame of mind. This chapter, in discussing the involvement of the liberal middle classes in the religious, intellectual, and charitable life of Newcastle, Bristol, and York in the early nineteenth century is prefaced on the notion that the 'political' requires to be broadened beyond the confines of parliament, the hustings, the council chamber, and the press. The proliferation
of clubs, societies, institutions, and associations in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries variously for religious, convivial, commercial, charitable, literary, scientific, economic, or civic purposes was all of a piece with the growth of associational activity in a political context. Individuals activities in these areas should not be seen as providing merely a context for their political activities — the two cannot be satisfactorily separated. Specifically, for example, religious dissenters supplied a significant proportion of the support for political reform campaigns in the early nineteenth century; contention over political and religious subjects frequently had the appearance of being the same conflict carried on at two different levels — the leading characters in each case being substantially the same.

The authorities were all too aware, especially at times of crisis such as the 1790's and 1816-19, that knowledge and information did not come value free, and sought to limit debate. The young Edward Baines, future editor of the influential Leeds Mercury, early discovered the difficulties of establishing free discussion in the 1790's when both a debating society at Preston and a 'Reasoning Society' at Leeds were suppressed. Although most of the members were reformers the debates were not political, indeed, the society's rules specifically excluded discussion of political, religious, or commercial questions, but they still fell under suspicion of being a political club. Interestingly the vast majority of literary and philosophical societies and Mechanics Institutes placed voluntary limitations on the scope of their discussions even when the wartime and immediate post-war restrictions had been relaxed. Rule VIII of the Newcastle Literary and Philosophical Society, established in 1793, laid down that:

"Religion, the practical branches of Law and Physic, British policies and indeed all politics of the day shall be deemed prohibited subjects of conversation". (7)

This was typical of the self-regulation countless other similar organizations imposed upon themselves. At a later date its leading founder suggested that these topics had been excluded with regret because they could not usually be discussed "without exciting those unfriendly sentiments which are inconsistent with the spirit of Christianity." An example from York shows that caution on the part of organizers was perhaps justified. In April 1816, a local learned society was created and died within a few months because of political animosities.
A later guide to the city noted:

"A Society was created for the public discussion of literary subjects. It was called the 'York Scientific Society', and caused great interest, and the discussions were numerously attended: but the society did not continue long, on account of the political rancour running high at the time". (9)

Libraries, like debating societies were regarded with official suspicion in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; the Corresponding Societies' Act of 1799 made it illegal to maintain either a circulating library or a reading room except under licence granted annually by two magistrates. The experience of the radical Robert Blakey of Morpeth showed that government concern was justified; he received his early political education through his subscription to a circulating library from which he devoured everything. He noted that:

"the prevailing feelings of the public were much averse to any extension of knowledge among the community at large. A good many of the political ends of the day were attributed to men becoming wiser than their forefathers". (10)

Thirteen separate circulating libraries have been traced in and around Newcastle in the period 1801-1830. Bookshops, moreover, could take on the character not only of social and intellectual centres but of party clubs, where men of political and religious sympathies met regularly — a notable example of this was Emerson Charnley's bookshop in the Bigg Market in Newcastle which became the headquarters of a whig clique. When information and debate could not be stopped individuals and organizations sought to control its flow. A proposed York Select Subscription Library, for example, in 1819, had the seemingly harmless aim of providing suitable reading material for the perusal of the 'middling' and 'lower' classes of society in York and diverting taste from novels and fiction. An anonymous churchman, however, persuaded prospective supporters to boycott the enterprise since most of the proprietors were Methodists — "The name of their new Institution certainly should have been 'Another Project for disparaging the church and promoting the interests of the New Chapels in this City'". In May 1836 at York, A Conservative Reading Association for "the middle and industrious classes of society" came into being. The Yorkshire Gazette spoke of the "urgent need of such a society, to counteract the baleful influence of that proportion of the press, and particularly the unstamped, who have been sedulously employed in disseminating seditious and pernicious doctrines".
The liberal Bristol Mercury reported in July 1838 that access to books in the city library had been restricted by the Tory management committee because "many consider the books will be injured if the mechanics have free access to them." 15

Social historians have discussed the striking growth of societies and institutions in the early nineteenth century in terms of the growth of a civic culture, and as a key factor in strengthening and cementing a coherent middle class consciousness. 16 R. J. Morris, for example, considers that a distinctive middle class ideology grew around the constitutional elements of voluntary societies — the committee, the A.G.M., the public meeting, the subscription, the printed notice, the annual report, and the various rules and regulations. Arguably clubs and societies embodied in their internal regulations and purposes the egalitarian principles they saw as desirable in the political realm. Amongst the Leeds middle class, upon whom Morris based his research, he perceived commonly held values — a widely held pride in prosperity, 'improvement' in commerce, cultural matters and charitable actions, a relationship of disciplined and humane superiority towards the poor, and deference and open accountability with those of a higher status. Certainly a large number of societies boasted of the ways that they united Anglicans and Dissenters, the different trades, merchants, gentlemen, and the professions, Whigs and Tories, in common associations promoting unanimity, harmony and social cohesion. Undoubtedly the political conflicts of the period made natural knowledge appear a soothing prospect to certain classes and groups, and could often demarcate scientific enquiry from party politics. The British Association for the Advancement of Science (B.A.A.S.) for example, held its annual meeting in all three cities in the 1830's, York in 1831, Bristol in 1836, and Newcastle in 1838; without exception all three events were overwhelmingly successful examples of civic unity. 17 The York Courant could comment in October 1831, following the inaugural meeting of the B.A.A.S. (and at the height of the reform agitation):

"Knowledge is powerful to preserve peace- to maintain the harmony of society, not by depressing one order to advance another, but by increasing the intellectual perceptions of all, leading them to see their mutual dependence." (18)

In other respects, however, the passions generated by early nineteenth century politics and religion can be represented as an irritating fly in social historians' ointment. The evidence from Newcastle, Bristol,
and York tends to indicate that partisanship and sectarianism could be impediments to the coherence and effectiveness of urban elites in the early nineteenth century. It was the damaging nature of political divisions to the city's well-being which engaged the attention of contemporary observers at York — the Yorkshire Gazette noting in June 1820, for example:

"There is no city in England where the effects of jarring and discordant interests are so visible as in York. They force themselves upon the attention of the most superficial observer."

And an individual in the Yorkshire Observer complained likewise in March 1823 — "In this great city nothing is thought of but Whiggism and Toryism". The Bristol Mercury developed the theme at greater length in November 1832 in arguing its view that there seemed to be no other city where politics drew stricter lines of demarcation between individuals of differing opinions:

"Political rancour is indeed the bane of the city, and it follows her merchants and her tradesmen not only to the hustings and the polling-booth, but into the house of God itself — to the abodes of charity — to the neutral ground of literature and science — and even to the places of trade and barter... it is difficult to conceive what connection an institution established to administer to the sick body, and another to furnish food to the healthy mind, can have with the Corn Laws or a Reform in Parliament; and yet is there a committee to be appointed, the advocates of either side struggle for a majority, and success is a matter of most serious congratulation."

As Tory candidates canvassed church bells rang out, flags hung from church towers, and they were decorated blue. Examples of the point which the Mercury was making came with contested elections to the Bristol Institution and Guardians of the Poor boards of management the following year. Historians with more specifically political interests, such as Derek Fraser, E.P. Hennock, and Vic Gatrell have shown convincingly that municipal politics were overwhelmingly "a contest for power within the urban middle class". Hennock's findings were particularly striking — he argued that on a local level there was little sense in interpreting the reforms of 1832 and 1835 as a new industrial middle class taking power. He compared the old and new municipal corporations of 1835 and 1836 and found that in Leeds, Whig merchants, bankers, doctors, and flax spinners replaced Tory merchants, bankers, doctors, and flax spinners. The dramatic changes came on different social dimensions — the new corporation was 39% Anglican
The early nineteenth century saw the politicization of lesser institutions—Poor Law Guardians, Charity Boards, vestries, highway surveyors, and improvement commissioners could all be chosen on political grounds. The differentiation in this thesis between the liberal middle classes and the Tory or Conservative middle classes is thus a sustainable one.

Religion played a central role in the lives of many nineteenth century individuals. The comparative strength of the religious denominations in Newcastle, Bristol, and York was estimated as follows in the first full religious census of Britain in 1851:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Newcastle</th>
<th>Bristol</th>
<th>York</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Church of England</td>
<td>39.2%</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
<td>48.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wesleyan</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
<td>24.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Methodists</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congregationalists</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baptists</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presbyterians</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unitarians</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quakers</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
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Overall, the census nationally showed a near parity of strength between Anglican and non-Anglican churches, even allowing for those Anglicans who attended non-conformist chapels in the evening, and the strength of dissent was even stronger in towns and cities. Even at York, a cathedral city and supposed stronghold of the establishment, less than half the churchgoing population was Anglican. The figures show a substantial catholic minority in all three cities, and there was an increase in catholic numbers, with an influx of Irish workers, in the later nineteenth century. Catholic Emancipation was certainly the issue of the 1820's in terms of the newspaper column inches, parliamentary debates, and private correspondence devoted to the question. 'No Popery' and 'Protestant Ascendancy' were still cries...
which carried resonance at elections and public meetings. There were particularly lively and hotly disputed meetings at Newcastle and Bristol in February and March 1829. 15-20,000 people attended the meeting in Bristol where it was reported that "the advocates for liberal measures were not listened to" and all the Anglican parishes sent processions with clergy at their head. A pro-Catholic motion at Newcastle was lost by an estimated 5:4 majority, although Losh reassured Lord Grey as to the feelings of the respectable middle classes:

"The Anti-Catholic Requisition was signed by no Magistrate, no Barrister, no Physician, one solicitor, one surgeon, one Banker, two merchants, and ten or twelve ministers, church of England... I can only say that I have not met above one or two Anti-Catholics in society since this measure was first brought forward". (24)

Methodists were to the fore at these meetings and were generally found on the Tory side of most political questions though they emphatically denied that they had political interests. Quakers tended to have an influence disproportionate to their numbers. The young Joseph Sturge, despite facing jeering comments upon his dress on the streets of Bristol, shared in the prevailing thirst for knowledge. He joined the Bristol Endeavour Society in 1813, an association of young Quakers who met regularly to discuss science, literature, and the fine arts. He delivered papers on astronomy, optics, and meteorology. At York the new Meeting House was completed in 1817, at a cost of over £3,000, of which York's contribution was £618. Quakers there spoke up consistently in favour of a purer and less corrupt electoral system. Drawn mainly from the substantial tradesmen class, they supported the candidacy of James Barkley in 1835 in an attempt to check electoral chicanery, and were subsequently instrumental in achieving the Select Committee which enquired into the conduct of York elections later the same year. Samuel Tuke, in particular, made a powerful plea at a reform meeting in November 1831:

"As a Freeman of York, inheriting its corporate privileges, I rejoice in any measure which will lessen or destroy the venality, the political corruption, the moral debasement which upon the present system appears to be inseparable from the choice of our representatives... For my own part, though highly valuing the right of being represented in Parliament, I have never exercised that right as a freeman of York, because I felt an utter contempt for the system upon which it was conducted, because I believed that it tended greatly to the demoralization of the citizens, and because I believed that the representation
of the city was not determined by real judgement of its inhabitants, but was, in fact, bought and sold..." (27)

Baptists and Independents gained control nationally of dissent's representative institutions from the mid 1830's, such as the Protestant Dissenting Ministers and Deputies leadership, and were an increasingly influential force in the early nineteenth century. The Baptist Minister at Bristol, the Reverend Mr. T. Roberts, spoke regularly at reform meetings. 28

Recent electoral studies have indicated that religious affiliation was often the single most important factor influencing an individual's use of his vote and certainly the political importance of all forms of old dissent can hardly be underestimated. Dissenters pursued a wide range of reforms outside their particular concern for the removal of religious tests, especially after their unsuccessful campaigns of 1787-90, and they provided a backbone of support for the Whigs who had a long tradition of pressing for repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts passed in the reign of Charles II. Protestant non-conformism was increasing in popularity, self confidence and influence in the early nineteenth century. 30 As the first issue of the Monthly Repository put it in 1827:

"... throughout England a great part of the more active members of society, who have the most intercourse with the people and the most influence over them, are Protestant Dissenters. These are manufacturers, merchants, and substantial tradesmen, or persons who are in the enjoyment of a competency realised by trade, commerce, and manufacturers, gentlemen of the professions of law and physic, and agriculturists, of that class particularly, who live upon their own freeholds." (31)

According to one recent estimate they formed perhaps 20% of the post-1832 electorate. 32

Political analysis and discourse was often undertaken on religious terms or on the basis of assigning individuals derogatory religious labels. Joseph Parkes writing to Lord Durham in March 1834, for example, referred to an electoral return he had received from agents at Leicester. Out of an electorate of 2,250, 1,107 were dissenters, 986 churchmen and 167 uncertain. In 1832, 1,024 dissenting candidates voted for Whig and Liberal candidates and 100 non-descripts, whilst 811 churchmen and 67 non-descripts had voted for the Anti-ministerial candidate. He drew the conclusion that the cabinet had to open its eyes to the palpable electoral necessity of
measures to relieve Protestant dissenters. The tory Fraser's Magazine noted of the 1835 election at York:

"It pleased these persons calling themselves 'the Dissenters' to dispose, in their great clemency and grace, of two other boroughs — sending to York a Mr. Barkley to occupy one seat in the place"

but it gleefully added that he had been defeated by J.H. Lowther, the tory candidate by about 500 votes. The Tory Municipal Annual of 1838 at Bristol did not restrain its language in describing opposition councillors who were also dissenters. Thus a Whig councillor George Tothill was depicted as "a clever, crafty, radical Quaker; he has used expressions against the church that will not be forgotten while there is a churchman in Bristol", and of George Thomas, another Quaker, it was noted that, "few men utter more bitter things in the course of the year and none looks more meek and gentle."

Complaints about churchmen involving themselves in politics were nothing new. 'An English Protestant', for example, in 1826 penned the following complaint about Sydney Smith, a regular and eloquent advocate of catholic relief and toleration, and addressed it, amongst others, to the freemen of York and the freeholders of Yorkshire:

"... who, but the Revd. Sydney Smith, can attend local Political Meetings, make long political speeches, write violent Political pamphlets, preach and publish highly political sermons; get up and sign, and be one of a party deputation to present Requisitions to a noble Lord to come forward... and then gravely tell you he has 'not the most distant intention to interfere in local politics'."

There is no doubt that Smith, one of the founders of the Edinburgh Review and a whig insider, enjoyed stirring things up. It was the custom at Bristol, for example, for the mayor and corporation to attend the cathedral every 5 November for "a discourse arranged for the solemn commemoration of the Gunpowder Plot". Smith, as a holder of a prebendary stool in the city went there in 1828 with the premeditated intention of ruffling some feathers — "All sorts of bad theology are preached at the cathedral on that day and all sorts of bad toasts drunk at the Mansion House. I will do neither the one nor the other...". He proudly regaled a number of correspondents with the details of the effects which his discourse on toleration produced:

"Today I have preached an honest sermon, before... the
most protestant corporation in England. They stared with all their eyes”.

He described himself as administering “such a dose of toleration as
shall last them for many a year”. The sermon was a revised version
of A Sermon on Religious Charity which he had delivered, and had
published, at York in 1825. His words were said to have "created
a sensation not merely in the city but throughout the country". His
address in favour of the catholic claims made at Beverley in 1825
was reprinted and freely circulated in Bristol in 1829. Catholic
emancipation was always a live hustings issue before 1829, partic-
ularly at Bristol. The 'Old Whig' moderate candidates at Bristol
in 1818 and 1820, respectively James Baillie and Robert Bright, were
both pressed upon the question and both attempted to equivocate and
hedge, the latter being forced by political expediency, and against
the feelings of many of his committee, to declare on nomination day
"I am not a friend to the catholic cause". Catholic relief was the
major issue at the York election of 1807 and Edward Petre's cathol-
icism was undoubtedly a factor in his defeat in 1830. In the North-
East the Reverend Henry Phillpotts, J. G. Lambton and Lord Grey were
articulate antagonists. Grey presented four petitions in favour
of relief from parishes in Newcastle, containing over 6,000 signa-
tures. After 1815, catholic relief was the one issue upon which
Grey was committed should the Whigs form a future administration,
writing to Lord Holland in February 1820:

"To Catholic Emancipation I consider myself so pledged that
I could not come in without it." (42)

Unitarians were numerically weak at Newcastle, Bristol, and
York, but exercised a degree of social, intellectual,
and political influence which was out of all proportion to the size
of their congregations. The three cities benefitted from the leader-
ship of three remarkable Unitarian divines — William Turner, Lant
Carpenter, and Charles Wellbeloved. A similar picture has been out-
lined for cities such as Norwich and Manchester, where the Unitarian
chapel was a central agency of social and cultural life, and radical
agitation was often led by Unitarian dissenters. A recent his-
torian of the peace movement in the early nineteenth century has
described the close knit groups and family connections which built
up around Unitarian chapels as "formidable phalanxes of liberalism
in the local setting" whilst Kitson Clark described Unitarians as
"an intellectual aristocracy in the ranks of Liberalism and Dissent."
Contemporaries, too, noticed their disproportionate influence—according to the Eclectic Review in 1836, "they were the only class of dissenters known to the political coteries or clubs", although Unitarians in fact became isolated from the mainstream of protestant dissent in the later 1830's. Their high profile was all the more remarkable given that attendance at their congregations suffered a comparative and an actual fall in the early nineteenth century, declining by an estimated 50,000 in the period 1800-1851. Their views have often been subsumed by the label 'rational dissent'; they rejected the doctrine of the Trinity and hence the divinity of Christ (which brought charges of atheism) but in other respects belonged to the Protestant dissenting tradition. They held to a flexible tolerant creed of religious individualism, as William Turner of Newcastle explained in 1811:

"Its members... desire to be considered as a Voluntary Association, not of Episcopalians, Presbyterians, or Independents, with respect to discipline - not of Calvinists or Arminians, Trinitarians or Unitarians, Baptists or Paedobaptists, with respect to doctrine - but of individual christians; each one professed christianity for himself according to his own views of it, formed upon a mature consideration of the scriptures, and acknowledging the minister's right to do the same; and necessarily united in nothing but a desire to worship the Supreme Lord of all as the disciples of one common master." (47)

In practice what one tended to get was a marriage between liberal politics, liberal religion, and useful knowledge. As a Unitarian pamphleteer noted in answer to critics within the established church:

"... there is no sect or denomination of christian so distinguished for the liberality of their sentiments, both political and religious, as this most respectable body. They are the consistent enemies of all offensive wars, of all arbitrary, unconstitutional and unjust measures. They are the rational and enlightened friends of freedom and reform. The habit of free enquiry on one subject, leads to the same unshackled exercise of the mind on another: hence, the Unitarians are uniformly the advocates of civil and religious liberty." (48)

William Turner was the minister at Hanover Square chapel in Newcastle for almost sixty years from 1782-1841, and although he himself remained aloof from personal political involvement, he was a key figure in the founding of Sunday Schools in Newcastle, the Literary and Philosophical Society (1793), the Society of Antiquaries (1813), the Mechanics' Institute (1824), and the Natural History Society (1829). In addition to this he was the secretary of the
Newcastle Anti-Slavery Society, a founder of the Newcastle Savings Bank in 1817, and in 1811 was one of the founders of the Bible Society, where he was also one of its secretaries for twenty years. It was indicative of the religious enthusiasm of the period that 3,000 people could attend the A.G.M. of the Bible Society in 1818, "principally of the middle classes of society, with many of their wives and daughters". Turner was singled out for particular praise by Brougham in the Edinburgh Review for his work in establishing Mechanics' Institutes in every town in Northumberland. In Turner's congregation the distinction between sacred and secular was obscure - the religious question passed naturally into intellectual inquiry, and the chapel was as much a social as a theological institution. Perhaps one of the reasons for Unitarian influence was the stress which was placed upon the printed word - Turner, Carpenter, and Wellbeloved all published several pamphlets - and the Newcastle Unitarian Tract Society established in 1813 issued and circulated over 100,000 copies of various publications. Amongst Turner's congregation were a number of printers and booksellers including the Hodgson and Mitchell families, Edward Humble and Emerson Charnley, booksellers, James Losh, and a solid core of merchants and professional men. Richard Welford described the congregation as "a conspicuous constellation in the literary firmament of Tyneside". It was an indication of the growing hostility to Unitarianism when Turner was thrown out of the Newcastle Bible Society in 1831 by evangelicals bitterly opposed to his beliefs. Friends organized an impressive public dinner to honour his services to the town. At nearly the same time the York Bible Society split when some members withdrew and formed a new organization, 'The Trinitarian Bible Society' on the grounds that the old society admitted all denominations of Christians including 'Socinians'. Charles Wellbeloved had been involved in the formation of the society in January 1812, when he made a speech in its favour, and in January 1813 the York Herald had noted the pleasing harmony which united the different denominations of Christian within the Bible Society.54

Charles Wellbeloved (1769-1858) was a divinity tutor at Manchester College, the dissenting academy which was situated at York from 1803-1840, and was a more directly significant force in the political life of York (he was offered, although turned down, the position of Vice-President of the York Whig Club in February 1821). He, and fellow ministers William Hincks (1794-1871 and John Kenrick
(1788-1877) worshipped in a seventeenth century chapel in St.Saviour-gate, and were prominent in reform causes, being advocates, for example, of Catholic Emancipation, Parliamentary Reform, and adult education (Wellbeloved was the key figure behind the establishment of the Mechanics' Institute in 1827). In 1844, Wellbeloved described how he and a number of whig friends including S.W. Nicoll, brought into existence the York Book Society in 1794. After a shaky start, "numbers... rapidly increased notwithstanding the increasing opposition and obloquy which they received from parties who had much influence on the upper classes of society in York and who were entirely mistaken as to the objects the founders of the library had in view." He perhaps deserves a more prominent place among the scientific founders of the Yorkshire Philosophical Society in 1822. In February 1820 he had sought advice from the Reverend J. Hunter, a promoter of natural knowledge at Bath, as to the formation and proceedings of an Antiquarian Society. He aimed to begin on a small scale "greater things may be hereafter achieved" - and wished to collect materials for a county history, and provide a place for the reception of interesting remains. Probably in the first rank of early nineteenth century archaeologists and ancient historians, Wellbeloved was a guardian of York's past and a constant critic of the demolition of parts of historic York. There were links between Turner, Wellbeloved, and Carpenter, for example, William Turner lectured as visitor of Manchester College from 1808 until his death, and his son was a tutor from 1809-1827. Turner was elected as an honorary member of the Bristol Literary and Philosophical Society in 1824. For his part Carpenter spoke on the theme of 'Christian Patriotism' at Newcastle in 1838.60

In Bristol in 1788 there was only one non-Unitarian on the town council, although enthusiasm waned at the start of the century so that Lant Carpenter, arriving in 1817, found the Lewin's Mead congregation in "an extremely critical state, attendance being tolerably thin, although all the seats were subscribed". Nevertheless in 1830 Unitarians were still one of the most socially influential groups in the city, including amongst their number such men as Michael Castle and Arthur Palmer. Carpenter forwarded a petition of thanks from the congregation for the restoration of the rights of Protestant Dissenters to Lord John Russell in February 1829, which further requested the removal of all civil disqualifications for religious opinions, and he added:
"There are among us men of high respectability for influence and wealth; and I need not hesitate in saying that our congregation possesses a fair proportion of that influence which arises from worth of character, general intelligence and active intelligence." (62)

Carpenter spoke at public meetings in favour of catholic emancipation and parliamentary reform, was similarly involved to Turner and Wellbeloved, in the establishment of educational and cultural institutions in the 1820's and 1830's, and provided one of the most balanced accounts of the Bristol riots. He was always ready to spring to the defence of his theological beliefs when they were attacked in the national press. Unitarians were the least Anti-Anglican of the dissenting groups and Carpenter deplored the growth in the 1830's of extremist demands on both sides - for complete retention or complete destruction of the Establishment's position. Unlike the vast majority of evangelical dissenters, Carpenter even opposed the outright abolition of church rates and argued for a qualified acceptance of the Establishment. Such views helped to estrange Unitarians from orthodox dissenters - Carpenter noted that "we are often excluded from co-operation in objects of benevolence and general usefulness." In 1834 when evangelical dissenters attacked the slow pace at which the Whig government was proceeding in dealing with their grievances, the Unitarians of Bristol sent Lord Melbourne a letter assuring him of their support for the speed of his policies.

All three men were closely involved with the establishment of Mechanics' Institutes in their cities. It was their belief that the education of the rational intellect would redeem individuals from immorality and superstition. But in a broader sense the establishment of Mechanics' Institutes might be seen as part of a liberal cultural strategy. At a national level, the political allegiance of those who advocated the establishment of Mechanics' Institutes was predominantly whig to philosophical radical; reformers such as Francis Place and Henry Brougham placed great faith in the power of education to effect social and political change. The greater the diffusion of knowledge and information, the more certainly would public opinion be progressively directed. As the Newcastle Chronicle wrote of Mechanics' Institutes in November 1823:

"It is impossible that they could long exist without indirectly producing results of a political nature most important and beneficial... a new and powerful influence would be created which would most materially augment and probably render overpowering, the influence already exercised by the middle classes." (67)
Brougham did not intend his educative efforts to take men's minds off politics - the best time and place for workers to acquire political knowledge he claimed in 1825, "is surely not the hustings at an election, but their own fireside or lecture room, before being called upon to exercise their power." Notably, in the North East, the leading individual behind the establishment of Mechanics' Institutes together with William Turner was James Losh, of whom Turner noted in his obituary speech that he had "long been looked up to as the head of the whig party in Newcastle". He used his considerable influence with the whig gentry and others to encourage the formation of Institutes in Durham, Sunderland, North Shields, and Alnwick. Naturally there was Tory suspicion that Brougham's solicitude for Mechanics' Institutes and useful knowledge was simply a bid for popular support. Members of the Tory clergy denounced the Institutes as schools of infidelity - "When we give a working man more education than what is necessary to read his Bible, we do him an injury". 'An Observer' writing to the Tory Bristol Journal in May 1825 opposed them as economically and socially undesirable - "It appears to me that they will necessarily lead to combinations among the workmen, and that a very considerable advance of wages may be naturally looked for from such meetings". They seemed, moreover, "to raise men far above their stations in society, and to give them a smattering of science which will neither increase their happiness nor their usefulness. I am a great friend to the instruction and education of the people, but I object to making them philosophers." Two weeks later, the paper's editor opined that the Institutes were:

"calculated to withdraw the working classes of society from that due influence which it was intended by Providence, their employers, and the more wealthy and educated classes of society, should exert over them." 

Brougham, on the other hand, positively revelled in such a possibility:

"some will tell us that it is dangerous to teach too much to the working classes for they say it will enable them to tread on the heels of their superiors - Now this is just the sort of treading on heels that I long to see." 

At a local level, however, the political heat was generally taken out of the establishment of Mechanics' Institutes at Newcastle, Bristol, and York. The projectors of the Institutes were from the same sort of occupational groups as patronized the provincial scientific, and Literary and Philosophical societies - physicians, surgeons and apothecaries, dissenting ministers and 'enlightened'
manufacturers and merchants, and they applied their experience of drawing up rules to the Mechanics' Institutes. The emphasis was switched towards natural science, a more neutral meeting ground, where Whigs and Tories could hopefully collaborate, and moral improvement. At both Bristol and Newcastle stress was laid upon the moral value of education in diminishing drunkenness, encouraging more considerate family men, and the promotion of reading and thinking among apprentices. There was also financial advantage in gaining all party support from local gentry and business leaders. Thus, discussion of religion and politics, and the provision of newspapers and fiction were banned - the emphasis was upon hard scientific discipline. The Bristol organization was established in May 1825 and its full title was the 'Bristol Mechanics' Institute for the Promotion of Useful Knowledge among the working classes', yet "party politics, controversial divinity and all subjects of local controversy" were to be excluded. Presumably this did not qualify as useful knowledge. It was the same at Newcastle when the institute was established in February 1824, although the rule at least prompted some debate there. At a public meeting, George Berkeley, a shopkeeper argued that:

"Useful as moral knowledge is to mankind, I do not think it more necessary than political knowledge. Nothing is more necessary than to teach the people what the institutions of their country are, and what they ought to be. No, say the higher classes, they already know too much, we must keep them back from approaching the tree of knowledge... let it never be said that the people have nothing to do with politics till it be shown that politics have nothing to do with the people. They have been stigmatized as the mob, the rabble, the swinish multitude - ..."

At this point the chairman Eneas Mackenzie intervened to point out that it had been decided that politics should be excluded from discussion and Berkeley brought his speech to an end. It is interesting that Mackenzie, a leading radical reformer, should have vetoed discussion - At this time, together with John Marshall, he was publishing The Northern Reformers Monthly Magazine in which, under the signature 'Peter Pry' he wrote many articles. Earlier in the month Mackenzie had written to a friend of the "exclusive and aristocratic nature" of the Literary and Philosophical Society, and of his hopes that the Mechanics' Institute would rival it:

"I think we shall not only do a public good but also soon vie with 'the Dons', who seem resolved to shut the doors of their society in the face of all who have not a heavy purse". (75)
And yet, anxious not to alienate public opinion, he sought to avoid any controversy in public.

Overall Mechanics' Institutes were handicapped by an air of middle class condescension - lectures were generally organized by interested members of the liberal middle classes for specified sectors of the working classes. Successful education is not something which is done to passive and uninvolved recipients. What happened at York was fairly typical - William Newmarch, an honorary secretary, showed in a pamphlet entitled *Observations and Statistics relative to the experience and operations of the Mechanics' Institute at York* (1842), how it was compelled to make major changes in its ideas and activities between 1827 and 1842. The attempt at providing scientific lectures and instruction for skilled artisans was abandoned, and instead popular lectures on literary and entertaining subjects were provided in response to consumer demand. There were more frequent excursions and social meetings. The majority of members, indeed, were not mechanics and artisans "but have belonged to the class of tradesmen, clerks, and shopmen". By 1834 the Institute was suffering from rapidly declining numbers and depressed finances - the balance sheet at the A.G.M. showed a deficit of £25,76 and the report of the committee as to the apathy and irregular attendance at the Institute's functions was damning. In the latter 1830's there was a considerable increase in members, and a growing influence among the young. But it was indicative of what had happened to the organization that in 1838 it changed its name from the York Mechanics' Institute to the York Institute of Popular Science and Literature. The committee suggested that this was "better adapted to the peculiar circumstances of the locality". In other words, Mechanics were thin on the ground in York.77 It was rare that Mechanics' Institutes ever reached the type of audience their founders desired. At Bristol, for example, after struggling through the 1830's the Mechanics' Institute was dissolved in 1845. It is interesting that workers self-education enterprises set up in opposition to middle class controlled institutions, such as at Edinburgh in 1825, often made a point of including novels, newspapers, and political literature.78 Mechanics' Institutes were not the only example of the attempted imposition of alien and restrictive values. The very names of societies give a flavour of their intent; there was a Bristol Society for the suppression of Vagrants, Street Beggars and Imposters, and the Promotion of Economy and Prudence among the labouring classes, and a
York society for the encouragement of faithful female servants. Samuel Nicoll wrote a pamphlet outlining the initial problems of the York Savings Bank which aimed from its establishment in 1816 to encourage planning for the future, "sobriety and prudence". It was greeted by indifference, if not aversion amongst those for whom it was designed and meetings were "thinly attended, languid, and nearly hopeless". Sunday schools at York saw their aim as "rescuing the children of poor parents from the low habits of vice and idleness, and initiating them in the principles of Christian religion", although the most recent historian of Sunday Schools argues that it is simplistic to see them merely as agencies of social control - they fulfilled real working class needs and were hardly effective organs of middle class propaganda.

If there was not a conflict within organizations, or between social classes, one could see the entrenchment of an exclusive elite who shared similar values. The contrast in outlook between the leading lights of Newcastle's Lit. and Phil. and Bristol's scientific establishment is quite marked, but both were dominated by a cohesive group of similar minded men. It was entirely characteristic of Newcastle's Literary and Philosophical Society that it had in its rooms in 1838 (and still displays) portraits of the Duke of Sussex, Earl Grey, Lord Brougham, Sir John Swinburne, the Reverend William Turner, and a statue of James Losh - all men with liberal connections. The Duke of Sussex, George IV's brother, was considered a sound liberal and had attended the Norfolk Fox Dinners in January 1820 and 1822. He was the man chosen to lay the foundation stone of the new building for the Lit. and Phil. in September 1822, and the accounts of the day's events are redolent of its progressive and liberal tone. Sussex stayed with J.G. Lambton at Chester-le-Street during his visit to the North-East and travelled into Newcastle in his carriage. He was officially greeted with a speech from Newcastle's Whig M.P. Sir Matthew Ridley, who remained at the duke's elbow. In his speech at the subsequent dinner in his honour, the Duke made as liberal a speech as was possible in the circumstances of a mixed political company:

"I like the principle that the King can do no wrong; but I do not wish the evasion of responsibility. I respect and love the aristocracy of the country, as a link between the sovereign and the People; but I do not like oligarchy. I am an admirer and supporter of the Rights of the People (loud applause); but it is not my interest, and I am not paid for being a Republican (applause)". (82)
Whig/Tory rancour among Durham and Northumberland county families was insufficient to prevent commercial co-operation - they were frequently brought together by marriage and mining syndicates. But it is noticeable that the Swinburnes and Ridleys lent their patronage to the Lit. and Phil. - the Bradleys, Carrs and Ellisons did not. Many at Newcastle made the link between education, progress, liberal values, and likely Whig support. For example, Dr. T.M.Greenhow (another member of Turner's congregation) presented a paper in favour of the establishment of a University or College at Newcastle in April 1831, "for the promotion of Literature and Science, more especially among the middle classes of the community". He cited "in proof that the present time is favourable for such an undertaking", the "liberal character of the existing ministry and their known desire to promote and encourage the progress of literature, as circumstances likely to ensure for it the countenance of government".

Bristol was conscious of a comparative backwardness as far as cultural and intellectual achievements were concerned, and of her lack of civic institutions. The Reverend John Evans in his History of Bristol published in 1816 described the task of presenting an overview of the state of literature and society in the city as "a delicate and difficult task. It was not easy to fix upon criteria which demonstrated the progress of science, literature and taste:

"The stranger who visits Bristol is astonished that it furnishes no public amusement except the theatre, and wonders that even that is, in general, attended by so few of the inhabitants".

The Chronicle of Bristol, a short-lived local periodical, in October 1829 noted the alleged characteristics of Bristolians:

"Her merchants, it is said, are illiberal and extortionate; her writers, her sculptors, her painters are few, and what is worse without encouragement; her literary and scientific institutions are talentless and ill-supported".

Whilst the editor denied the validity of this stereotype, in August 1835 John Ham could still write to Francis Place, "This place is half a century behind all others of equal population in the 'march of intellect' "

Considerable efforts had been made in the 1810's and 1820's to rectify this position; a number of religious and philanthropic societies were established and in 1811 plans were put forward for the building of an institution for literary and philosophical purposes. This took some time to get off the ground, and at
the annual dinner of the Bristol Philosophical Institution in 1824 a
speaker regretted the limited support from men of wealth and influence. Most importantly, the Bristol Institution for the Advance-
ment of Science was founded in 1823, the same year as the Chamber of
Commerce, and it was this which spawned the Mechanics' Institute in
1825 and the briefly successful Statistical Society in 1836. The
historian of scientific culture and intellectual developments in
Bristol, however, has shown that unlike at Newcastle it had a distinct-
tively conservative character, and developed inside an already power-
ful and confident social elite:

"The scientific culture of early nineteenth century Bristol
was markedly non-utilitarian, and conservative. It was
not the product of marginal men, but rather the brief
achievement of a well-established, predominantly Anglican,
bourgeoisie... tinged with an active element of elite
Unitarians".

A flavour of the views of those at Bristol who viewed science as a
potent instrument of social control is provided in a letter from a
Professor of Natural History in the Philosophical and Mechanical
Institutes of Bristol to the Tory M.P., Sir. Richard Vyvyan in
January 1834:

"You will learn Sir, with pleasure, that our Institutions
are productive of much good to the community. We diffuse
sound principles in science and literature, and ultimately
expect to enlighten the understanding, elevate the views,
improve the policy and excite the piety of a late con-
vulsed and perverted people".

Tory Anglican families such as the Harfords, Vaughans, Daubenys,
Acrmans, Fripps, Miles and Georges had close commercial, social,
and political links within Bristol's Corporation, and the Society of
Merchant Venturers. There was a clear overlap between those who
financed philanthropic, commercial, and cultural activities in the
period 1810-1825, and interestingly the wealth of these families
was diminishing, and they may have been seeking to underpin their
authority by other means. The liberal middle classes were effec-
tively frozen out at Bristol, and the Bristol Society of Enquirers
began in 1823 almost in defiance of the Bristol Institution, and was
sympathetically covered by the Bristol Mercury. One of its regular
lecturers was William Herapath, a future leader of the Bristol
Political Union, who in 1828 accused the institution of "entertaining
science not of promoting it". Certainly the institution's lecture
programme was patrician and strictly by invitation only. 'Uno' complained in the *Bristol Mercury* in December 1824:

"Philosophy should make no such paltry distinction between those who have a desire for knowledge as whether they ride in carriages or walk on their own legs, especially in a city where the majority of those who are of the greatest consequence have risen from the lowest and most menial stations". (88)

The Society of Enquirers provided at least a foundation for a genuinely local, less elitist culture, distinct from the Bristol Institution. Even J.M.Gutch, the Tory editor of the *Bristol Journal*, under his 'nom de plume' 'COSMO' recognized the social exclusiveness of what he described as "the commercial aristocracy of this city", and the dangers to Bristol's trade if they did not begin to mix more:

"In visiting, Sir, the Exchange or Commercial Marts of other great cities, it is impossible to overlook the mutual intercourse, civilities and attentions which appear to exist between the higher and middling classes of merchants and manufacturers... wealth alone does not confer rank and importance, or raise the individual in the same ratio above the middling class of his fellow merchants, as the rich landlord is generally exalted above his poorer tenant... this foolish and narrow principle of the pride of wealth has of late years been too predominant in the city of Bristol". (89)

The range of charitable activities which grew in the century before 1850 was quite unprecedented - they were essentially local, financed by local resources, administered by those who provided the funds, and designed to meet needs agreed within the local community. Newcastle, Bristol, and York were no exception in this respect, and in the absence of state provision, a wide range of voluntary philanthropic institutions performed an invaluable service. The *York Herald* could describe the city as "unrivalled for its local charities" and the York Charitable Society, for example, sought to lessen the number of vagrant poor and seek out deserving objects of charity of every religious denomination. It referred applications to a visitor of each district who could detect imposters, and was thus able to make a distinction between the deserving and undeserving poor and direct help accordingly. Joseph Sturge could note in his diary of Bristol in February 1813:

"as the pressure of the times becomes greater, I think Bristol benevolence increases in proportion, for there is scarcely any species of misery but there is some charity open to relieve it". (90)
But even charities were not a neutral political zone. At Bristol, in particular, some charities were partisan and abused as electioneering funds, and there was an enormous row in 1837 when the Lord Chancellor appointed a majority of Liberal Charity Trustees. Arguably this kind of decision was necessary to maintain a political balance. Bristol consisted of 18 parishes each of which possessed generous charitable endowments, but W.P. Taunton complained to Lord Brougham in February 1837 that this money was, "... exclusively managed by the churchwardens, and a small self-elected select vestry, consisting of ten or a dozen persons, who do not admit their fellow parishioners to be present at their vestry meetings, nor to know what they do with the money...[each]... is a regularly organized standing Tory committee for the purposes of parliamentary and municipal elections...". The Gloucestershire Society, to give another example, was ostensibly a charity for raising funds for lying-in women, but was in practice the occasion for a partisan dinner where several toasts were drunk to honour people connected with the Tory party. There could be contention at York, too, surrounding the Corporation Charities and the selection of charity trustees - the Yorkshireman in September 1836 referred to the "mixing up of political feeling in the appointment of an ornamental member of the city council". Most obviously political were the three Colston Societies which met and dined in Bristol on 14 November each year at separate dinners. Edward Colston (1636-1721) had been a West India merchant who had built up great wealth and had made recorded benefactions of over £70,000 with many other sums given in secret. The Dolphin Society had been established by the Tories in 1749 and usually met at the White Lion, the Tory election headquarters, the Grateful Society was set up in 1758, and the Anchor Society in 1768. The Grateful was the least political of the societies, established by people who had risen to position and influence in the city having been educated by, or otherwise indebted to, Colston's charities. According to one view of the purpose of the Anchor Society, "The Grateful Society had failed in its object of suppressing the political character of the Dolphin". There was some competition as to which society could make the largest collection; clearly there were beneficial charitable results from this, but political conclusions were drawn from the comparisons. Henry Bush, for example, the chief tory agent in Bristol reported to Sir Richard Vyvyan in 1834 that:

"Colston's Anniversary took place on Thursday last, the
Dolphin Society was extremely well attended; more than two hundred gentlemen and a subscription of nearly five hundred and forty [pounds].... Whereas the Anchor had only ninety persons and a small subscription..."

And the Bristol Mercury represented the subscriptions of 1838 (Anchor £756, Grateful £730, Dolphin £639) as evidence of a liberal revival and party unity. The annual dinners acted as rallying points of the faithful, as each year's press reports demonstrated, and more importantly they disbursed charities with an eye to political support. Robert Bright, in seeking a contribution to the Anchor Society from Lord Grenville, the High Steward of Bristol, in 1821, described the society's proceedings. It provided funds for the relief of distressed families and lying-in-women during the winter, and money obtained at the annual dinner was distributed in sums of seven and ten shillings "to applicants recommended in the personal knowledge of individual members":

"There is scarcely an obscure street in our city that does not bear, in the gratitude of deserving objects - yearly testimony to the value and success of the exertions of the Anchor Society".

Sums were given in secret and not registered individually. In 1832, another Anchor President Charles Savery similarly asked for patronage and support (several annual applications having been left unanswered) but Grenville was wary and asked for more information. Another lengthy account of the organization of all the Colston Charities confirmed that the Anchor was "chiefly supported by the Whig interest" and described November 14 as "the annual gala day of the Whig interest." It was indicative of the increasing conservatism of Bristol's 'Old Whigs' that four of the ten men who chaired the Anchor Society from 1820-1830 - Charles Pinney, James Lean, William Claxton, and Robert Bright - subsequently became Conservatives.

It would clearly be inaccurate to give the impression that all collective endeavours were rent with internal dissension or are always most clearly represented if interpreted in conflictual terms. That the early nineteenth century was a period when urban elites demonstrated a striking ability to give institutional form and organization to their wider interests is undoubted. There was considerable bricks and mortar achievement and activity. At York alone there was the construction of the impressive Yorkshire Museum (1827-30), the Savings Bank (1819), Dispensary (1828), Friends Meeting House (1819), Landed Chapel (1815), Albion Chapel (1816), St. Georges Chapel (1826), the
gas works (1823), and new prison (1820). Moreover, the cultural revival at York was given considerable impetus by the renowned Musical Festivals which began in 1823 and were repeated in 1825, 1828, and 1835. The amount of energy, planning, and organization which went into the successful visits of the B.A.A.S. at York, Bristol, and Newcastle were impressive testimony that internal political rivalries could be suppressed. The people of Newcastle published an extended account of their experiences, the better to appreciate their own success and to educate other less enlightened towns. And the Yorkshire Gazette reported that the visit to York in 1831 gave welcome relief from the "rage" and "heart-burning" of party politics. Nor was political and religious hostility equally fierce in every town or region - of the three towns under discussion the descending order of rancour was probably Bristol, York, Newcastle. For the Bristol Mercury in 1838, the inclination of citizens to mix up politics with the Chamber of Commerce, Literary and Philosophical Society, City Library, and Commercial Rooms was the town's "besetting sin". But even at Newcastle one could still have a meeting in February 1835 connected with the provision of newspapers within the Exchange Subscription Rooms, where proceedings were governed by "a strong party feeling", after one copy of The Times had been discontinued and replaced by the Morning Chronicle. The Newcastle Journal reported of a special meeting that "upon no previous occasion was there so numerous an attendance". Given the passions generated by early nineteenth century political and religious debates, it is hardly surprising that reforming energies, and a corresponding opposition to change, spilled over into other areas. Several historians have shown how this conflict gave way to increased social and political harmony and co-operation between the 1840's and 1860's, with elites being united by a common concern with expenditure, efficiency, improvement, and civic pride. What has been shown in this chapter, however, is that in the early nineteenth century, new organizations and institutions ran the gauntlet of upsetting social and political susceptibilities. 'Epicurus', for example, complained of the Yorkshire Philosophical Society in the Yorkshire Observer in January 1823, that it was "under the government of a committee which is an Aristocracy... it excludes from all its advantages not only the entire bulk of the community, but the first order of Tradesmen, Men of Letters, and artisans". Indeed, in a city "divided by political parties, religious sects, and rival possessions", any man,
however honourable, might find himself excluded in the ballot for new members. Political disagreement could emerge in the most surprising of places; a correspondent in the Bristol Mercury in September 1834 complained of how the proceedings of a Bristol Horticultural Dinner were hijacked by ultra-Tories with toasts to 'church and King', and argued that, admitting 'The Bishop and clergy of the Diocese', the 'Dissenting Ministers of Bristol' ought to have followed. He had little anticipated that, "an occasion so totally disconnected from politics would ever be made the stalking horse to serve a party purpose". 101
FOOTNOTES

1. Lord Durham's speech on the Second Reading of the Reform Bill in the House of Lords, Friday 13th April 1832... (London, 1832) pp.11-13. Through contacts with London radicals Durham sought to back his arguments with empirical reinforcement c.f. Place MSS Col. Leslie Grove Jones to Place 7 April 1832.


8. Ibid., Vol.4 W. Turner to the Committee 25 June 1807.


13. 'A Churchman', Remarks on the Behaviour of Sectaries, Occasioned by The York Select Subscription Library, Addressed to the Friends of the Established Church (York, 1819).


24. Grey MSS James Losh to Grey 28 March 1829, for this meeting c.f. J. Sykes, Local Records, or Historical Register of Remarkable events which have occurred in Northumberland and Durham II 10 March 1829, P. Cadogan, Early Radical Newcastle (Consett, 1975) p.51.


30. There is an enormous and impressive literature on this subject, e.g. R.G. Cowherd, The Politics of English Dissent (New York, 1959);
33. Lambton MSS Parkes to Durham 8 March 1834.
34. Fraser's Magazine II (1835) p.237; Sketches of Councillors in the Tory Municipal Annual for 1838 (Bristol, 1838).
40. cf. Anon., [Rev.H. Phillpotts], A Letter to Earl Grey from one of the Clergy, 22 January 1821 (Durham 1821). In this open letter Phillpotts complained of remarks made by Grey during the 1820 election campaign in Durham: "Popery and Mr. Lambton, combined with Lord Grey, and all that he can say or do, will not put down the Reformed Church of England in this diocese or elsewhere." cf. G.C.B. Davies, Henry Phillpotts, Bishop of Exeter 1778-1869 (1954).
42. Grey MSS Lord Grey to Lord Holland 18 Feb. 1820.
46. R. Currie, A. Gilbert, and L. Horsley, Churches and Churchgoers,


53. R. Welford, Men of Mark II p.455.


57. Yorkshireman 27 April 1844. Inter-denominational strife appears to have been a not uncommon problem besetting the establishment of book clubs and libraries e.g. B. Wood, Town Clerk of Tiverton to Hon. D. Ryder, Tiverton 2 April 1799: "... I did not join our only book-club because it was started by Dissenters...", E. S. Chalk, "Tiverton Letters and Papers, 1724-1843", Notes and Queries CLXX (1936), p.118.


59. C.F. C. Wellbeloved, Account of the Ancient and Present State of the Abbey of St. Mary, York (York, 1829), Ibid., Eboracum or York under the Romans (York, 1842).

60. V.D. Davis, A History of Manchester College (1932); L. Carpenter, Discourse on Christian Patriotism (1838).

of the Reverend Lant Carpenter (Bristol, 1842) p.54.


64. Quotation from L. Carpenter, 'The 'Standard' and 'Courier' London Newspapers, and Christian Unitarians' (1836) p.3 (Cowen Tracts, Newcastle Univ. Library, Vol.72 No.7), c.f. Ibid., Essential Doctrines of Christian Unitarianism (1832); Anon, [L. Carpenter], Unitarians not Socinians: An appeal to the good sense and candour of professing christians against the improper use of the term Socinian (1830).

65. Bristol Journal 18 Apr. 1834, for opposition to this letter in Bristol see 'A Dissenter', Bristol Mercury 28 June 1834.


67. Newcastle Chronicle 29 Nov. 1823.

68. Edinburgh Review XLII (1825) p.216.

69. W. Turner, A Memoir of the Late James Losh, A Sermon Preached on Oct. 6 1833... (Newcastle 1833); E. Hughes (ed.) Losh II p.176.

70. Quoted in M. Tylecote, The Mechanics' Institutes of Lancashire and Yorkshire Before 1851 (Manchester, 1957) p.64.

71. Bristol Journal 21 May, 4 June 1825.


73. Bristol Mercury 2, 16 May 1825, Tyne Mercury 2 March 1824.

74. Rules and Orders of the Bristol Mechanics' Institution for the Promotion of Useful Knowledge among the working classes (Bristol, 1825) p.5.


82. An Account of the Proceedings at the Laying of the Foundation Stone of the new building for the Lit. and Phil. by the Duke of Sussex, together with an account of the dinner given on the same day to His Royal Highness by members of the Society and Masons' Lodges (Newcastle, 1822).


92. Bristol Mercury 16 Sept.1837; Yorkshireman 10 Sept. 1836.

93. S.G.Tovey, Colston, The Philanthropist (Bristol, 1863) p.160; H.J.Wilkins, Edward Colston (Bristol, 1920) pp.110-111.


95. B.L.Add. MSS 59420 (Grenville Papers) f. 98, 101, 161-165 R.H. Bright to Grenville 22 Oct, 9 Nov. 1821, C.Savery to Grenville 6, 28 Nov. 1832.

96. A. Beaven, The Municipal Representation of Bristol (Bristol, 1880) 'Presidents of the Anchor Society' pp.56-57.


The Reform Crisis 1830-32

In 1829, or even in early 1830, the whigs could not have foreseen that they would be in office by November 1830. It was only a fortuitous combination of circumstances which meant that long standing difficulties and problems had been resolved. Lord John Russell's motion in February 1830 to enfranchise Manchester, Birmingham, and Leeds, defeated by 288-240 in the House of Commons, had helped to unite whig and radical sentiments and brought Lord Grey out of the shadows in which he had languished since 1827. The death of George IV in May 1830 removed the obstacle of royal displeasure - William IV was more favourably inclined towards the whigs. The July Revolution in France had some effect in forwarding reformist sentiment in Britain. Above all, the unity and strength of the tory party and government had been shattered by the passing of catholic emancipation, which temporarily created a political landscape in which familiar landmarks ceased to apply. 1 A speech by the Duke of Wellington on 2 November 1830 represented a watershed. He claimed that:

"in no way could the state of the representation... be improved, or be rendered more satisfactory to the country at large... the legislature and the system of representation possessed the full and entire confidence of the country." (2)

The disastrous reception afforded this speech demonstrated that the existing representative system had, in fact, lost the confidence of the country, and helped to usher the whigs into office committed to some measure of parliamentary reform.

Some modern historians play down the role of popular pressure in the passing of the Reform Bill and argue that the impetus came not so much from progressive opinion as from anti-liberal forces which favoured reform for what it would stop rather than what it would achieve. They place emphasis upon parliamentary manoeuvring at Westminster and regard catholic emancipation as the key factor in bringing about reform in that it converted 'ultra-tory' opinion to a belief in the necessity of reform, and precipitated tory division. 3 Thus a tory newspaper such as the Birmingham Journal could support the formation of the Birmingham Political Union in February 1830 and admit that:
"We never were the advocates of self-constituted political clubs until our present ministers confessed they had succumbed to the catholic association, and by the enactment of the Relief Bill, sanctioned the means by which it was obtained." (4)

This chapter will not provide a detailed narrative of the passing of the reform bill since this would be to retread the ground of several well-researched and competent accounts of these events, but it will seek to contribute to the debate on the extent to which the whigs' policies were affected by popular pressure, and especially the Political Unions around the country, and it will look in particular at the attitudes and views of Lord Grey.

The Reform movement still had relatively little central direction and tended to be fragmented, with little co-ordination of activity. Francis Place, for example, the leader of the London based National Political Union did not know William Herapath, the leader of the Bristol Political Union, and had no dealings with him in 1831-32. Attention has hitherto fallen upon one or two leading individuals from the middle classes, such as Thomas Attwood and Place, but whilst these men were of enormous importance locally - in Birmingham and London - their national significance has been exaggerated (not least because they were impressive self publicists) to the neglect of the role of a large number of local associations and leaders who exercised the main influence within their own particular area. In most of the large towns campaigns were organized by men who had few official channels of communication with the government. Over 100 Unions across the country met regularly, discussed the fortunes of the bill, drafted parliamentary petitions, offered their services to local magistrates to maintain the peace, and generally made their presence felt. What national unity the movement had was provided by the press, as reformers in each area read of demonstrations elsewhere. Whilst it cannot be shown that organizations at York, Newcastle, or Bristol had a specific impact on the shape of the legislation which emerged in 1831-32, it was the accumulated weight of pressure from organizations and meetings throughout the country which both impressed and perturbed the whigs.

It would be facile, however, to portray the 1832 Reform Bill simply as the product of irresistible 'pressure from without', or the whig government as captives of provincial agitators. The timing of the agitation does not support such a view. The whig Morning
Chronicle had complained in characteristic language in July 1830 at the scanty movement made by the reform movement in the provinces, and, at the 1830 General Election, Parliamentary Reform was not a major issue. It re-appeared on the national agenda early in 1830 in resolutions and petitions adopted at public meetings and a flurry of agitation which ended seven years of relative silence, but Francis Place would still write early in November 1830 that:

"The people who must make changes or give the cue for changes are the middling people, and they are not as yet at all disposed to demand any change." (9)

The whig 'Committee of Four' which drafted the bill, according to instructions which laid down that the measure should be:

"large enough to satisfy public opinion and to afford sure ground of resistance to further innovation, yet so based on property, and on existing franchises and territorial divisions, as to run no risk of over-throwing the [existing] form of government",

agreed upon its essentials before the agitation in the country reached commanding proportions. A Select Committee later reported that 645 petitions were received by the House of Commons between 5 November 1830 and 4 March 1831 (and several times that number after the introduction of the bill) but fewer than a fifth of these petitions dated from the period before parliament recessed in mid-December. According to the Attorney-General, before the Reform Bill was introduced, "the public mind was in a state of great turbulence and excitement" but the introduction of the Bill "tranquilized it". Arguably the opposite of this was the case. There were clearly expectations of reform when the whigs came to power, but this did not amount to a large degree of popular pressure until early 1831, and after whig proposals were put before parliament. What was largely expected in the country was an extended version of the tinkering which had occurred in the 1820's with the disfranchisement of patently rotten boroughs such as East Redford and Grampound, and some redistribution to the larger towns. When the reform proposals were first announced in March 1831 they thus came as an enormous shock to tories and others; in particular, the sheer weight of Schedule A boroughs (60), (in other words boroughs of under 2,000 voters) that were to lose both their M.P.s seemed especially drastic, whilst 47 Schedule B boroughs were to lose one member each. Greville described the proposals in his diary
as "a sweeping measure indeed, much more so than anyone had imagined". Although subsequent concessions and amendments revised the figures downwards, and the details changed, the final proposals approved by parliament were more daring and advanced than reformers could have expected.  

Whilst the terms of the Reform Bill were not dictated by popular pressure, and the House of Lords were finally persuaded to pass the bill not so much by public commotion as by the threat of the creation of peers, whig leaders constantly reiterated that they had to do enough to conciliate public opinion. Lord Grey, writing to the King's private secretary in January 1831, for example, noted that:

"Much must be conceded to public opinion and more perhaps may be forced upon us, but... with the universal feeling that prevails on this subject, it is impossible to avoid doing something; and not to do enough to satisfy public expectation (I mean the satisfaction of the rational public) would be worse than to do nothing." (14)  

It is important to bear in mind that much of what was said by whig ministers was conditioned by (if not determined by) the audience to which it was addressed, and here Grey was in the business of persuading a sceptical king of the necessity of a sweeping measure — but a similar message came through in ministers' private correspondence. Moreover, there were clearly keypoints during the reform crisis at which public pressure made a real difference. The dissolution of parliament early in May 1831 came about largely through popular pressure, and the General Election of 1831 was very much a single issue election where reformers swept into power. The House of Lords rejection of the second reform bill in October 1831, which resulted in rioting in Nottingham and Bristol, had a profound impact upon political unions and the reform movement in general. And in May 1832, when the Duke of Wellington was recalled and proved unable to form a government, the pressure from mass meetings, petitions, and a proposed run on banks was considerable. The Reform Bill was thus, in part, the product of a new kind of public opinion and of novel conceptions about the role of public opinion in the constitution; not merely as a checking but also an initiating force.  

The whigs identified public opinion and 'the people' with a particular, if ill-defined and diverse, socio-economic group — the middle classes. Lord Grey, for example, spoke of "the middle classes who form the real and efficient mass of publick opinion, and without whom
the power of the gentry is nothing..." and few whig pronouncements on reform were complete without a eulogy of the middle classes. Such men were the possessors not only of vast new forms of property and interests, generated by the commercial growth of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, but were also 'respectable', intelligent, and well-educated. The principle, William Stanley explained, was to extend the franchise "as widely, and amongst such persons as might safely exercise it with advantage to themselves and to the existing institutions of the country". Sufficient property would ensure independence from the mob and it was estimated (on the basis of very rudimentary investigations) that a £10 household franchise in the boroughs would enfranchise the kind of elector that the whigs had in mind. It is important to recognize the differences in terms of attitudes and goals between the urban middle classes and working class radicals. It was the view of the Manchester Guardian in December 1830, for example, that workers, "by their situation in life, their habits, and their ignorance, are incapable of exercising the [electoral] privilege with judgement and discretion". The Birmingham Political Union had described itself upon its formation in February 1831 as a union "of the middle and lower classes for the attainment of Parliamentary Reform" and had seen the necessity of offering inducements to the lower classes in order to enlist their support for predominantly middle class goals. Differences emerged, however, not only between middle and lower class elements, but across and within classes as well as between them. It was notable, however, that a basic alliance remained in place until the Reform Bill was passed. On this, at least, there was agreement.

External popular pressure on parliament had long been a feature of politics but the way that Grey and whig ministers responded to the challenge of agitators in their first year of office was an important departure from the way that previous politicians had reacted to popular agitation. Lord Grey and his colleagues not only sought to satisfy popular demands, but also at times sought the help of agitators in the struggle between whigs and tories over the reform question. When Lord John Russell and Lord Althorp wrote letters of thanks and acknowledgement to the Birmingham Political Union in October 1831 (and Russell notoriously referred to the decision of the House of Lords as "the whisper of a faction") it created a political storm. Given that Lord Grey had in no way lost his distaste for radical tactics and rhetoric that he had
expressed at the time of the Newcastle Fox Dinners, and given that
William IV could describe Political Unions in his speech at the
opening of parliament on 6 December 1831 as "incompatible with all
regular government and... equally opposed to the spirit and to the
provision of the law", 22 Grey's toleration of the existence of
Political Unions requires explanation. Others interpreted Grey's
toleration as a sign that he approved of, and condoned, the unions'.existence, and he was accused of weakness, especially in Autumn
1831 when he came under a lot of pressure from the House of Lords
and the King to crack down on the unions. The Duke of Wellington
certainly suggested to the King in private that they be suppressed
by force, 23 and Grey was only just able to talk the King out of
issuing proclamations outlawing unions. The whig leader promised
to act against unions of which he had accounts of highly seditious
language and conduct "the moment we are in possession of evidence
on which we can act with a certainty of conviction".24 He argued
in a letter to Sir Herbert Taylor on 8 November 1831 that :

"if the question can be settled, all the sound part of
the community would not only be separated from, but
placed in direct opposition to, associations whose
permanent existence every reasonable man must feel to
be incompatible with the safety of the country..." (25)

Grey, in fact, had a very difficult line to maintain with respect
to political unions. The legal position was not as clearcut as the
King had described it, and political societies were not illegal
merely by the fact of their existence, although they were not
supposed to confer or communicate with one another.26 As J.R.
Fenwick commented to James Losh of the Northern Political Union,
"They occupy a kind of debateable ground where Govt. cannot inter-
fere without obvious dangers". It was Grey's view that "as long
as they keep within the limits of the law, it does not seem pos-
sible to take any measures for their suppression".27 He considered
that Political Unions must be dealt with firmly and given no
official sanction, but that their existence should be tolerated
until the passage of the reform bill led to an inevitable dis-
ersal of the union's forces. The passage of the bill would
strengthen the authorities against institutions which Grey was
aware were often intent upon wider goals. Acting against the
unions might have fatally damaged the bill's chances and Grey
could employ the argument that if reform was not passed, the
resulting discontent would encourage perpetual political unions. Noting, for example, that unions had received an impulse from the House of Lords rejection of the bill in October 1831, he added:

"If this... continues, I greatly fear not only that the unions will be more extended and organized, but that they will receive great additional strength from being joined by a description of persons who have hitherto kept aloof from them". (28)

Abolition would have smacked of the suppression of opposition movements in the 1790's and 1810's which Foxite whigs, including Grey, had vehemently objected to. There were, moreover, practical constraints working against a policy of repression. The government did not command military resources sufficient to deal with simultaneous or closely spaced outbreaks of discontent in dispersed places. The army strength amounted to only about 25,000 (there was a long standing hostility in England to a large standing army) and the whig cabinet resisted the King's repeated suggestion that the army be expanded.29 Local militias were unreliable and inadequate for the purposes of domestic repression, as individuals were reluctant to act against their neighbours. Thus Grey rejected military repression and opted instead for adaptive policies of consent and concession. To argue thus is not to say that Grey liked the political unions; he distrusted them and kept a close eye on their activities, instructing the Home Office, for example, to ascertain whether or not they were agitating for more radical reform than the bill offered.30 At the same time, informers sent reports to Lord Melbourne describing the composition of provincial unions as best as they could determine.31 Nevertheless, Grey had to take political unions and other manifestations of reforming opinion into account in deciding, for example, whether or not to dilute the bill and come to terms with the House of Lords. In the whig leader's mind the bill was a necessary concession in order to secure for the governmental system the confidence of the people. During and after the reform debates he insisted that the government should direct and regulate "the current of improvement and reform" and endeavour "to adopt its institutions and policy to publick opinion and gain the affection and confidence of the governed".32 But he also sought to achieve a final reckoning in the sense of settling existing grievances for many years to come. Given his fear of not doing enough to satisfy reformist opinion,
the reaction to his proposals across the country in March 1831, typified by events at Newcastle, must have cheered him enormously. James Losh reported to Lord Brougham:

"We were threatened with a formidable opposition from the Radicals and the free burgesses, but the leaders of the former declared their unqualified approbation of Ld. John Russell's bill, and disclaimed Hunt's declaration that the radical reformers were not satisfied - the only shade of dissatisfaction they could air was the duration of parliaments but they would even submit to that in order to prevent dissensions",

and T. E. Headlam confirmed, in a note to Grey's son, that the proposals had united reformers "of all shades and degrees". Encouraged by the likes of J.S. Mill, Place, and Joseph Parkes, who consciously sought to manipulate and manufacture public opinion through meetings, pamphlets, and the press, the whigs could also articulate the view, as the bill's passage seemed jeopardized, that the people's violent discontent was only held back by the reasonableness and constitutionalism of the political unions. Few took much persuading that this was in fact the case. Lord Brougham assured the King, for example, that:

"the unions even at Birmingham and elsewhere were composed and composing of those who must stand between us and the plundering mobs of Hunt and Bristol".

He argued quite correctly that William IV,

"was not aware of the extent to which men of some property had engaged and were engaging in these unions, nor perhaps alive sufficiently to the distinction of unions on account of wages, unions for political objects, and armed associations". (35)

It now remains to be seen what was actually happening on the ground in Newcastle, Bristol, and York.

The role of the city of York in the reform agitation of 1830-32 is the most briefly and easily described; its involvement was mainly low-key. Reform was not the over-riding issue of the 1830 election contest and a Tory sponsored nominee, Samuel Bayntun, defeated the whig Lord Mayor, Edward Petre. A political union was never established in the city, although the 'York City and County Reform Association' did seek to achieve some of the objectives of such an organization between December 1830 and October 1831. The character of the corporation at York, neither Tory, over restrictive, nor offensively corrupt, tended to defuse local demands for
reform. Moreover, at least initially, several York Tories, and even the *Yorkshire Gazette*, favoured parliamentary reform, following their unsuccessful opposition to catholic emancipation (the paper was appalled, however, in March 1831 by what it saw as "Russell's purge" and spent the next year hoping that the bill would fail, and be rejected by either the House of Lords or the public. It welcomed the resignation of the whigs in May 1832 and regretted their reinstatement). Only in May 1832 did events at York achieve national publicity. An angry crowd approached the Bishop's Palace where they burnt an effigy of the Archbishop, uprooted some palings, and frightened the Mayor into calling for military assistance from the 8th Hussars in order to disperse them. Such a demonstration was completely out of character and was, in any case, misdirected. The Archbishop was broadly in favour of the disfranchising and enfranchising clauses of the reform bill, and had misunderstood that his vote in favour of an amendment proposed by the tory Lord Lyndhurst, would in fact have the effect of defeating the bill and lead to the resignation of Lord Grey.

At the 1830 election, the sad remains of the soon to be disbanded York Whig Club had sought to elect two men who would support the general aims of the club, "a general reform in Parliament, a more equal representation of the people, and a retrenchment of the public expenditure". In fact Bayntun was elected alongside the whig Thomas Dundas, with the former achieving an impressive 1,706 plumbers out of his total of 1,924 votes. Bayntun described himself as a reformer, and was in favour of the total abolition of slavery, but he had attacked corporation and Fitzwilliam influence, was backed by the most partisan of local Tories, and was strongly anti-catholic. His election also owed much to Tory vigilance in collecting out-voters, and a generous expenditure of over £8,000 (there was subsequently considerable legal wrangling between the candidate and his committee over unpaid bills). Much to the disgust of his Tory backers, however, Bayntun's reformist views turned out to be more than skin-deep. In March 1831 he immediately declared in favour of the whig proposals in the House of Commons and denied that men possessing "so deep a stake in the preservation of public order" would introduce a revolutionary and dangerous measure. The danger, given "the state of public feeling throughout the country" lay not in the adoption, but the rejection of the proposed measure. He voted in the majority in the House of Commons
on 23 March 1831 which passed the bill's second reading by only one vote, and was a popular candidate and the 'Freeman's Friend' at the general elections of 1831 and 1832, when he had virtually no money to disburse.

There was talk of a Reform Association at York early in December 1830 and, in the opinion of the York Herald, it was the duty of the liberal party of Yorkshire to "assist in the formation of such an association". Following a public meeting on 28 December 1830, which issued a declaration and rules, the 'York City and County Reform Association' was established with leading supporters including Sheriff James Meek, Edward Petre, George Strickland and William Hargrove. Its first annual meeting a week later, however revealed a total membership of less than 200. If it ever sought a genuine mass membership, it in fact never became more than an intellectual gentleman's society. Notably it was an association rather than a political union that interested parties at York wished to establish. There was more than a semantic difference; associational behaviour had a respectable eighteenth century aristocratic pedigree, whilst political unions were something new and potentially dangerous. Naturally there were public meetings at York at key times in the reform crisis, but these were largely reactions to events rather than gatherings which sought to precipitate and initiate changes. Moreover, on two occasions the York association explicitly chose not to operate through public meetings. In September 1831, for example, the association petitioned the House of Lords in favour of the Reform Bill, before a general meeting of reformers had taken place or any moves by the corporation. The York Herald reported a resolution of the Birmingham Political Union of 27 April 1832 that it was "absolutely necessary to make a grand exhibition of public feeling in every town and city" and added that "Liverpool, Bath, Leeds, and a countless number of equally influential towns have also joined in the cry of 'The Whole Bill, or No Bill!'" but York did not meet. In May 1832 the events around Bishopsthorpe prompted a swift military reaction, and a great deal of excitement and apprehension from observers on the ground. In addition to damaging the archbishop's palace, there were also attacks on the home of Captain Price who had chaired an anti-reform meeting, and repeated attempts to burn an effigy of the Duke of Wellington. Good humour and sense prevailed, however, and demonstrators were dispersed without the use of force. Clashes had occurred after a
reform meeting attended by an estimated 4,000 people. A large part of the crowd had gone on to disrupt a smaller anti-reform meeting. There was nothing to sustain claims of Tory newspapers beyond York, however, that the demonstrations had occurred "at the instigation of certain whig leaders". 47

Reformers in Newcastle and the surrounding areas played a more active role than their York counterparts in contributing to the nationwide agitation in favour of 'The Bill', especially after the establishment of the Northern Political Union in June 1831. Leaders could claim that this union was composed of all classes of reformer, "the intelligent Whig, the honest Radical, and in the midst, the high-minded Liberal" who had "compromised to achieve Reform", but this was to take an especially rosy view. 48 The union always represented an uneasy compromise of various interests and political viewpoints, it had been slow to get off the ground, and lost most of its support soon after the passing of the bill. On the other hand, it had on occasions been able to generate mass support, and in May 1832 both Lord Grey and Lord Durham replied to a message of support from the Northern Political Union, and spoke of the traditional enthusiasm always shown by the determined friends of reform in Newcastle. This gave the organization a degree of credibility (although Charles Attwood, brother of the Birmingham union leader, and other union members, were criticized by Grey in his private correspondence). The storm which had been created over the letters written by Lord John Russell and Lord Althorp to the Birmingham Political Union in November 1831, obviously did not deter Grey and Durham from writing similar notes of thanks. 49

From the vantage point of 1830, national issues rarely impinged upon Newcastle politics. According to one local political analyst there tended to be "a great want of earnestness in contending for the principles of either Whig or Tory". 50 One is not able to deduce from the election at Newcastle in mid 1830, for example, whether opinion was running strongly against the Duke of Wellington's administration. The candidates made no reference to the balance of power in the House of Commons and there is little evidence that the electorate had any interest in the subject. The political affiliations of the three candidates, at what eventually turned out to be an uncontested election, were unclear. Sir Matthew White Ridley, whose family represented Newcastle in parliament in a line of unbroken succession between 1747 and 1836, and who
combined extensive landed property with coal mining, industrial and banking interests, had been a bulwark of Whig orthodoxy in the past, but was now on the right of the party. In the post-reform period, after applying unsuccessfully for a peerage from Lord Grey, he moved further to the right and in 1834/35 joined the 'Derby Dilly'.

Cuthbert Ellison, who like Ridley had been an M.P. for Newcastle since 1812, had a genuinely independent voting record in the House of Commons and was described thus by Sir Charles Monck, a prominent Northumberland Whig in October 1812:

"He has been born and bred a Tory but is considerably whiggized by living with the Ridleys and Bigges and others of this country and also by his own opinions upon the conduct of the Tories in power during the last few years..." (52)

And John Hodgson was no archetypal Tory although brought forward in the Tory interest. He voted in favour of the Reform Act and in some ways was to be as much of a reformer as his Newcastle whig counterparts in the 1830's. At the general election of 1837, for example, he declared his firm support for legislative protection for factory children. Newcastle Tories eventually dispensed with his services in the late 1840's because he held insufficiently rigorous protectionist views. Ellison's withdrawal in June 1830 meant that Ridley and Hodgson's election was uncontested and these two men were to be confirmed as the town's M.P.s in a further uncontested election in May 1831. Whilst there was an outside possibility that Ridley might have lost his seat if the election of 1830 had been contested, the views of the candidates as regards parliamentary reform were not a prominent issue of discussion. 53

'A Constitutional Reformer' had expressed the hope in the Tyne Mercury in March 1830 that northern reformers were not only motivated to act only at times of local economic depression, and had argued that the question of parliamentary reform deserved to be brought forward and discussed:

"... looking at the times, and the manner which this question has been before agitated amongst us, it would almost lead to the conclusion that it was a passing feeling produced by temporary causes." (55)

Some popular interest in reform was aroused by news of the July Revolution in France and a public meeting in Newcastle expressed support for the actions of the French people. However, opinion in the North of England was clearly moving in favour of reform.
The tory M.P. Sir Henry Hardinge reported in a letter to Mrs. Arbuthnot in December 1830:

"From the North a friend of mine, a Mr. Buddle, says the question of reform has made great way amidst the middling classes, and that the Duke of W. from being very popular has lost all favour for the present by his declaration against reform". (56)

Nevertheless there were no mass meetings to petition parliament until December 1830. As veteran reformer Thomas Doubleday recalled in 1858:

"In 1832 there was no great stir until the Bill came before the country. It was after the question was fairly launched that the storm came - the operations before March 1831 were chiefly pamphlet publishing in which I had a share; but the steam was never fully up until the dissolution of Parliament and the second edition of the Bill..." (57)

Even in December 1830 the ground had to be carefully prepared beforehand. The moderate whig reformer James Losh confided to his diary, "I much fear that the suspicion and impatience of the ultra reformers may create dissension and cause confusion". There was much behind the scenes management and somewhat "stormy debate" as to whether the question of voting by ballot should be included in a requisition to the mayor and the petition to parliament. In the end it was left as an open question. (58)

172 Whigs and radicals requisitioned the mayor for a public meeting, including the likes of Headlam, Losh, Bigge and Fenwick, staunch whig reformers from the time of the Newcastle Fox dinners, together with a new generation of radical leaders who went on to become the leading figures in the Political Union, Charles Attwood an ironmaster, Anthony Easterby and Thomas Doubleday, soap manufacturers, John Fife and Charles Larkin, doctors, and Eneas Mackenzie, a publisher. At the meeting in the Guildhall, the ballot was strongly urged by Attwood, but Losh rejoiced in his "complete failure". An amendment to the effect that if the representation was not reformed, "consequences might take place which could not be contemplated without dismay" also failed to be passed. (59)

An editorial in the *Tyne Mercury* following this meeting advocated Reform Unions on the Birmingham model to strengthen ministers' hands, and a week later announced that plans were in train to form such an association, but a Political Union did not get off the ground until June 1831, although there had been a public
meeting in March to congratulate ministers on their reform proposals.  

By the end of May 1831, it had become obvious to radicals, given a fillip by the General Election excitement, that the Bill was not necessarily a full answer to their demands. Doubleday and Attwood, who had assisted his brother in forming the Birmingham Union in 1829, decided to form a radical association to press for further reforms. The parliamentary events of April, however, had also alarmed moderate reformers in the North-East, afraid that the existing bill would not get through. Thus almost all the leading reformers were to join the Northern Political Union, albeit some with reluctance. The liberal middle classes were uncertain, and for some whigs and moderate reformers the aim was to keep the union "within bounds", and "to put a drag upon the wheels to prevent the machine from proceeding too rapidly." Losh dismissively described the union's leaders as "a few ill-judging men", and argued, with a great deal of self-assurance, that it might have been stifled at birth if he had not been absent from the North-East at the time of its formation:

"Had I been in the country when this union was formed, I think I could either have prevented it, or diverted it to temporary and harmless purposes".

His aim by November 1831 was to narrow down its objectives to supporting the whig ministers, assisting in the election of whig and liberal M.P.s, and helping the government and the magistrates to preserve the public peace.

The union, however, had been founded with wider objectives than these in mind. Thomas Doubleday circulated a letter containing 'Outlines of a Plan for a Northern Political Union' on 1 June 1831 to "a number of friends of parliamentary reform and of civil liberty" resident in Newcastle, and the objects and rules of the union were discussed and agreed at a public meeting held on 27 June. It was stressed that the Bill was only a means to an end:

"It is the means afforded to the people for electing a more free, bold, and honest House of Commons... The ENDS which that House of Commons is to accomplish, are yet to be obtained".

These ends included a reform of "monstrous and mischievous abuses" in the civil and ecclesiastical establishments, and a removal of the "taxes on knowledge". The general management of the affairs
of the union lay in the hands of a council which was to meet weekly in Newcastle during sittings of parliament and fortnightly at other times. Initially 29 council members were co-opted, and later it was planned that 40 members would be chosen annually by ballot, although these elections never happened. Members of the union, who paid a voluntary subscription of not less than 1/- per quarter, were to form themselves into classes of about 12 people with an elected 'conductor', who it was suggested could minute proceedings, communicate with the council, and lead class proceedings. Much of this latter plan proved to be pie in the sky, as a disenchanted W.A. Mitchell commented in September 1832, "The Council of the union was in fact the union...". The wider membership was comparatively insignificant. Mitchell had been a member of the union, claiming that it had initially fulfilled a useful purpose by concentrating and focussing the opinions of "many classes of reformers", but he was critical of the union leadership:

"Their committees or councils were generally constituted of individuals calculated to give an exaggerated view of the grievances of which the people complained. They were commonly ultra-radicals..."

He claimed that he remained in the union in order to tone down and control violent opinions - "the secession of the moderates would have thrown the whole power into the hands of inflammatory members". Although it was an objective of the union to secure "the interests of the industrious classes", the aims of even radicals such as Doubleday and Attwood focussed upon their hopes for greater power to be given to the middle classes. The union faced an uphill task in engaging the support of the North-East working classes, and in particular the Keelmen and miners. Doubleday founded his hopes for parliamentary reform on a plan:

"to give the elective franchise (that is a portion of political power) to all the middle classes of society, to all those who, from education and circumstances, are likely to make a good use of it. Were this effected, the rich and the powerful would soon feel that their future consequence depended wholly upon their at least keeping pace with their countrymen in knowledge and virtue". (66)

The idea that the middle classes possessed a monopoly on knowledge and virtue has been effectively scotched by modern historians, but this kind of contemporary perception was widely held and repeated. After criticizing the aristocracy for "living apart from
society in general" and not sharing the concerns of their fellow men, Charles Attwood added:

"It would be a strange thing if such a man knew more of agriculture than the agriculturist, more of commerce than the merchant, more of manufacture that the manufacturer, more of shipping than the owners of ships, more of science than the engineer... To obtain efficient members, then, for a reformed parliament, it will be found necessary to look amongst the middling, as much as amongst the higher classes of society". (68)

Attwood had hopes of the union genuinely promoting social harmony, but other unionists made it clear that they interpreted the goal of unifying classes to mean that:

"the society will offer an opportunity for the middle and perhaps the higher classes, to meet together, without factious views, and discuss affairs of interest and moment; and thus and thereby proceed in perfect harmony to a great public object". (69)

The union sought in vain to convince working men that the bill would open the way for reduced direct and indirect taxation from which they would benefit.70 Tommy Hepburn, the influential leader of the Durham pitmen, did, on one occasion, seek to persuade a well attended meeting organized by the political union, of the material benefits to be hoped for from Reform:

"We shall get some of our mercantile gentlemen popped in yon house, and free trade will be opened out (Applause). Then there would be a better market for the fruits of our industry; there would be employment for every man; we would get bread to eat, and we would sometimes get a little rum in our coffee (laughs and applause...)" (71)

This speech was delivered at the best attended meeting of the political union in October 1831, with the crowd estimated at 50,000,72 but Hepburn's was a lone voice, and this speech proved to be a 'one off' which was not followed up. There was high unemployment amongst Tyneside Keelmen at this time, and Durham miners were engaged in a prolonged industrial dispute, manufactured by local coalowners,73 for much of 1831 and 1832, but the Political Union was unable to bridge the gap between workers' occupational grievances and the reform agitation. Newcastle radicals were largely out of touch with the organized Tyneside working classes, whose special conditions of work and close communities had led them to become self sufficient in defending their own interests.
Only the meetings of October 1831 and May 1832 (attended by an estimated 10,000 people) generated a genuine mass response, and such a turnout could in any case prove worrying to moderate whigs. Commenting on the May meeting, Losh considered that "there were too many _sans culottes_ in the crowd to please calm minded and reflecting people." 74

The record of the Northern Political Union was thus mixed. Local whig and reformist M.P.s were either wary of committing themselves to supporting the union, or occasionally downright hostile. At the end of July 1831, for example, the council of the union wrote to the two Newcastle M.P.s asking whether it was correct that they had voted against the government on the question of disfranchising the Appleby constituency. Hodgson replied courteously, but Ridley refused to answer a question from, "a body of whose existence as a part of the constitution I am at present not aware of and whose authority, if acknowledged, must tend to supersede and abrogate that of my constituents". 76 Meetings could on occasions be poorly attended or fractious. Only 3,000 people braved the rain for an outdoor public meeting on coronation day in September 1831, and in April 1832 there were fewer than 2,000 people at an indoor meeting. 77 A public breach between whigs and radicals occurred at a meeting in the Newcastle Guildhall on 26 September 1831, when agreed resolutions were hijacked by Attwood and his radical supporters who argued that the moderate language of the petition inadequately reflected the feelings of the people. This precipitated a whig walkout and a subsequent separate meeting. There were wide differences in members basic philosophies which could be "patched up [but] not healed". 78 On the other hand, however, there were occasions, when the union was able to marshall an impressive number of people in its cause. A petition to the House of Lords in September 1831, for example, measured 157 yards and contained 30,734 signatures. It also received attention from political unions elsewhere - William Cobbett later commented that the speeches the leaders of the northern union had genuinely given "a tone to the whole country". 79 It was able to give widespread indignation an institutional form and channel the energies of individuals into peaceful expressions of dissatisfaction. John Fife, for example, told the mass meeting of May 1832 that in the previous three days the union had enrolled more members than it ever did in any six months of its previous existence.
"Numbers of well-educated, intelligent and affluent men — men who have a stake in the country — have come forward and said "We thought, before, you went too far; but we now find it necessary for the safety of civil liberty, and we are determined to support and join you". (80)

Indeed it was probably the union's greatest achievement that agitation in the North-East was conducted peacefully and legally. The leaders had been at pains to take legal opinion as to the legality of their rules and explicitly stated that they were "to employ all legal means" to obtain the desired reforms and were "to aid, in every practicable way, in the preservation of peace, and the protection of property, in case of any local disturbances". (81) There were no riots or disturbances in Newcastle to match those at York, let alone the conflagration at Bristol. This made the extreme language of Charles Larkin at the public meeting in May 1832, following Grey's resignation, especially shocking. He produced a melodramatic call for armed revolt and abolition of the monarchy should the bill be lost and recollected the fate of Louis XVI, Queen Adelaide, and Marie Antoinette. Attwood and Fife immediately condemned this kind of language but Larkin's words created some alarm in parliament. As chairman, T.E. Headlam, an ally of Grey, had not called Larkin to order and the Marquis of Londonderry called for an explanation in the House of Lords. Losh, however, defended Headlam ("interrupting him would have caused much confusion which was exactly what our enemies wanted") and argued that, in any case, Larkin's words had had little effect — "he went too far even for the taste of the mob". (82) A warrant was in fact issued for Larkin's arrest on charges of high treason, although this was never executed.

Bristol briefly threw off its conservative and cautious shackles in 1831, amidst a wave of spontaneous enthusiasm for reform. In April 1831 the slavery and anti-slavery sections of the whig party in Bristol were "welded together by the popular passion of the hour". At an earlier reform meeting, Protheroe had observed with satisfaction:

"the union of old whig families in support of this great cause. I have pleasure in seeing the names of Pinney, Ames, Bright and other honourable opponents, combined with those of my own liberal and attached friends". (83)

At the general election the reform fever swept Protheroe and Baillie to an uncontested election victory on a budget of only £200, the first occasion on which two whig members had been elected for Bristol since
1774. In contrast to the usual scenes at Bristol elections there were no open houses, no drunkenness, and no disorder in the streets. R.H. Davis had told the House of Commons how he would denounce the Reform Bill to his constituents, but he was advised to withdraw before he even reached the city. The result attracted national attention, The Times commenting that:

"Even Bristol, the stronghold of Slavery and Toryism which sent up to parliament the only petition against the bill that deserved the least attention, has discarded its long-tried representative",

whilst the Morning Chronicle added that "such an example so unexpected from such a quarter, may give a moral tone to the elections throughout the kingdom." Especially impressive at this election was the co-operation of Bristol's trade societies which went on to become the basis for Bristol's political union. There were a series of well-attended public meetings in favour of reform, and petitions in favour of the reform bill from merchants, bankers, traders, and other inhabitants of the city were forwarded to parliament in January and September 1831 signed respectively by 17,775 and 25,740 people. But the riots, which took place from 29-31 October, and left Bristol in the hands of a rioting, pillaging mob which destroyed all of the city's public buildings including the Mansion House, Customs House, Excise Office, The Bishop's Palace, and three gaols, together with forty commercial premises and private homes, overshadowed other elements of the reform agitation in Bristol. The riots were the subject of many contemporary descriptions and analyses and have continued to attract the attention of modern historians. The account offered here will not provide a blow by blow account of events or a detailed analysis of who the rioters consisted of. It will briefly establish the context in which the riots took place, assess the role of Bristol's political union, and establish that both the central figures on the side of the authorities - the Mayor, Charles Pinney, and the military leader Colonel Thomas Brereton - who were slated for their lack of firmness and inaction during the riots, deserve a degree of sympathy for the position in which they were placed, although both the magistrates and the military were at fault. After the riots there was a period of stunned inaction before the collapse of the fragile alliance between whigs and liberals in the Summer and Autumn of 1832. Class distinctions in Bristol between 'respectable' reformers and the political union, unlike in Birmingham, had proved too wide for consensus.
The growth of reform sentiment in the city fastened primarily not onto national questions, but rather onto reform of the corporation and improving the local economy although, of course, national and local issues were linked. Harman Visger rallied a meeting of the political union in October 1831 with the assertion that "... the close corporations would not stand a single session" if the reform bill passed, "... the immense revenues of that body would be applied to the good of the city rather than to the purchase of luxury and idle ceremony". The corporate system was clearly increasingly alienating many Bristolians who saw the corporation and magistrates as so much in opposition to the people that they were "two distinct bodies". Many aldermen were non-residents and the corporation was much criticized for its extravagance, exclusiveness, and a damaging lack of concern for Bristol's local trade and industry, and for the provision of adequate policing within the city. As regards range, performance, and functions, corporations varied widely - there was no model. The Liverpool corporation was rare in being attuned to the needs of the time - it widened streets, organized a water supply, and even built elementary schools. Bristol's corporation stressed the management of charitable endowments and the enjoyment of frequent dinners. Latimer was scathing about the corporation's extravagance - in May 1828 they spent £802 in laying in a supply of Madeira and Port for the council house and spent a further £947 to supplement the cellar in the next two years. Moreover, "the cleansing of all but the leading thoroughfares was generally left to the elements" and "the paving, lighting and watching of the city were miserably imperfect". As its historian points out, the Corporation was "not inclined to spend time and effort on matters related to the welfare of the poor". This meant that there was indifference to the inadequacy and bad condition of the water supply and no discussion on the question of public health. It should be stressed that this neglect by local government of accountability and of the people's welfare was by no means unique. Southampton and Newcastle are two examples out of many which could be cited as inefficient closed corporations. It was probably the case, however, that even by contemporary standards the city was badly run. It is easy to believe, therefore, that "the habits of ostentation and gratification may not have helped the corporation when riots burst in 1831". Living conditions were poor; how poor compared with other places is difficult to judge. In 1831 the population of Bristol
was 117,016 which represented a growth of 61.1% in thirty years, but physically the city was able to expand relatively comfortably. Nevertheless it does seem that the sanitary condition of Bristol was bad even by contemporary standards. According to reports in the 1840's, the rates of mortality in Bristol were only marginally lower than the rates for Liverpool and Manchester. It was from the overcrowded and dirty streets of the poorer sections of the city that the rioters were to emerge in October 1831. These general problems were compounded by the fact that there was widespread economic distress and a stagnation in trade in 1831-32, for which reform was regarded as a panacea. The Reverend T. Roberts, for example, a baptist minister, speaking at a public meeting in May 1832 observed:

"If they went upon their own Quays, they would see the hundreds, the starving hundreds, forced away from a soil that should have afforded them sustenance to seek it in a foreign land (cheers). If they went into the shops of their tradesmen, they found them unable to grapple with, or to stand under the load of taxes which bent their knees beneath their weight (cheers). If they went into the Commercial Rooms and their mercantile counting houses, the cry was that there was no business, the hands hang down, and the mind was inactive, because of the absence of that lucrative employment which used to give activity and energy to both (loud cries of 'true', 'true')". (95)

Reformist sentiments were further assisted by the parliamentary performance of the ultra-tory Sir Charles Wetherell, Bristol's Recorder, and M.P. for the rotten borough of Boroughbridge in Yorkshire. The Times described him as "the opponent of reform in every shape, and steady defender of every existing abuse". In order to delay the passing of the reform bill through the House of Commons in the summer of 1831, Wetherell spoke 73 times at the committee stage of the bill. If the House did not take him particularly seriously, the people of Bristol were not likely to know this. Especially provocative to Bristolians was his statement on 27 August that "the Reform fever has a good deal abated in Bristol". He was to face scenes in October 1831 very different to those which had greeted him in April 1829; at this time his refusal to compromise over the catholic question, which led to his dismissal from the lucrative post of Attorney-General, brought him great popularity. Ironically he was welcomed by a large crowd at Totterdown with continual shouts of "No Popery! Wetherell for ever!" By October 1831 the Bristol Gazette could comment that he had "rendered himself odious
and obnoxious to the people of Bristol" and it was fairly obvious that his arrival would provoke a demonstration of disapproval.\textsuperscript{98}
The liberal middle classes, in general, would have wanted to demonstrate their displeasure; for some this involved active participation, for most it meant taking a certain amount of vicarious satisfaction, at least at first, from seeing the mob at work. Both whig and tory contemporary pamphlet accounts referred to the number of "respectable citizens" and "tradesmen" who, particularly on the first day, took part in, or tacitly approved of the outburst.\textsuperscript{99} A witness at the later trial of Mayor Pinney in October 1832, describing the crowd which gathered to shout abuse at the troops, claimed that "the gentlemen had silk umbrellas over their heads, the females had silk cloaks and pelisses". When later prosecuting one Patrick Kearney as a leader, the Attorney-General noted that he was "a man possessed of some little property" and complained:

"The effect of such a man going among a mob, must be most mischievous because it tends to hold out encouragement to the most depraved part of society, by lending it the countenance of those who are somewhat higher in the scale of society than themselves". (100)
The passivity of respectable property owning individuals during the early part of the demonstration against Wetherell points to a widespread sympathy with the cause of reform. Sir James Scarlett, the defence lawyer at Pinney's trial, commented dryly, "it appears to me that all Bristol seemed to be spectators". Major Mackworth, a staff officer who was in Bristol on leave at the time, confirmed that "party politics... had no mean share at first in countenancing if not encouraging the violence of the mob".\textsuperscript{101} Having said this, the later conclusion of John Ham, writing to Francis Place, can be endorsed that, "the affair began politically and ended criminally, and by different sets of persons".\textsuperscript{102} Not a single member of the political union was implicated in instigating or taking part in the riots.

The Bristol Political Union was born at a mass meeting of the trades in Queen Square on 26 April 1831, and was initially formed by and for 'Mechanics and Journeymen belonging to various trades'. Its objectives were primarily local; to protect individuals who might suffer from voting conscientiously and to collect information in order to form a register of the disposal of the various charities, its secretary later recorded that it was:
"Originally formed more to protect the rights of the inhabitants against corporation influence, speculation and monopoly, than for more extensive political purposes, but it was gradually led into a greater field of operations by the coincidence of circumstances." (103)

It took a little time to get off the ground, however, and the Bristol Mercury reported at the end of May 1831 that a local meeting of reformers was "to form a General Union on the plan of the Birmingham Society, for securing to the humbler classes their constitutional rights and privileges". Its effective leader was William Herapath, a Professor of Toxicology and Chemistry at the Bristol Medical School, but, as its secretary John Ham noted, it was seen as being too radical for the professionals and businessmen of the whig Reform Committee. In a reference to the political stance of T.J. Manchee, Ham wrote to Francis Place that:

"neither he, nor many of the Reformers in Bristol, moving in the same scale of society as Mr. Herapath and myself, would join us - all were opposed to the union as too revolutionary - so you may imagine what a sense of duty it required to me to proceed amidst all darts of obloquy".

He reported that people were overawed by "the corporation here and their friends (which comprise all the people of influence in Bristol nearly)". Of a meeting in June a journalist observed that there were:

"but few present above the grade of mechanics, the more influential of the liberal party having kept aloof either from disapproving of the union, from apathy in the cause, or from a desire not to interfere in a matter which might be regarded as more particularly concerning the operatives exclusively". (106)

It is difficult to estimate the extent of membership of the Political Union but since the entry fee was 6d., and there was a further subscription of 4d. a month, it is unlikely that many below the ranks of artisans joined. The figure was possibly around 500, but there was clearly much wider support than this at times of crisis. The Bristol Mercury listed 24 skilled trades that were represented at a meeting in December 1831. The union's rules prescribed that two-thirds of its council should be operative mechanics. The Reform Committee provided a nebulous middle class counterpart to the political union, and was initially founded to secure the election of two reformers in the 1831 election. It confined itself to giving order and regularity to public meetings connected with reform.
Its membership consisted mainly of merchants, bankers, and businessmen who had previously made known their opposition to the corporation through institutions like the Chamber of Commerce and who claimed to be "Reformers precisely because they would not be Revolutionists."

The revelation that the government was in communication with the Birmingham Political Union in September 1831 heightened tension between the government and the King, and his directive was that under no circumstances should ministers give the impression that they accepted or approved of political unions. This was the context of the rejection of the Bristol Political Union's offer to help keep the peace, because such service would "be a sort of recognition of the union's legality." Edward Protheroe, who had close relations with the political union, offered his services to attend Wetherell and with the union keep the peace, with the proviso that "the people of Bristol thus constrained be allowed to express in some measure their strong and unalterable disapprobation". Lord Melbourne at the Home Office refused the offer, insisted that the gaol delivery go ahead, and sent three troops of regular cavalry (about 93 men) into the Bristol area with orders to obey the magistrates. Trouble was clearly expected and Alderman Daniel, a tory stalwart, contacted Herapath on 21 October requesting the services of the organization to maintain peace and order. Whilst this request was being considered, the union heard that the city authorities intended to employ an armed force to protect Wetherell, and as Ham put it, "it was then in vain to repress the indignation felt at this palpable falsehood... I am quite convinced that the union could and would have preserved the peace of the city but for this reason". Herapath also refused Daniel's request on the grounds that "if they were present and any breach of the peace were committed it would by their enemies be attributed to them." It was the later view of the union that:

"if, instead of sending for soldiers, the reformers of Bristol had been properly encouraged and properly organized under the respectable leaders of the union, there would have been no rioting. The Recorder would have been hissed - no power could have prevented that demonstration - but there the annoyance would have ended". (112)

The unions refused further co-operation with the authorities and slapped in a public demand that the corporation should resign and allow fresh elections. At the same time it earnestly recommended members of the union and reformers in general "to use their most
strenuous endeavours for the preservation of the public peace, as it is only by such a course they will be able to secure the rights they seek". 113

The union insisted that it offered to help suppress and prevent rioting from an early stage and that during the riots it made attempts on its own authority to quell the violence. According to reports in the Bristol Mercury, which were repeated in the national press, some members of the union rallied round in a laudable manner:

"The firmness and patriotism they have displayed in the present emergency entitle them to the esteem not only of their fellow citizens but the whole country". (114)

But clearly, as far as officials were concerned, the attitude of the union was unhelpful. On the Sunday evening (29 October), for example, about 200 householders were gathered in the council house and Herapath was asked, in the words of Major Mackworth, "whether he would get the union together to save the town. He said he could not answer for it if the soldiers were employed". Mackworth was reportedly "much disgusted and disheartened at the party spirit displayed". And Major Beckwith, a future chairman of the North Durham Registration Association, gave short shrift to reports playing up the heroic role of the union in quelling the riots. He reported that they only offered help after order was restored - and then he made sure that they were "out of harm's way in Queen Square." 115

The Rev. J. Eagles ultra-tory interpretation of the riots had a great influence on subsequent accounts, and the union's own version of events was never published, but it is available in a history put together by Francis Place. Caution is, of course, required in reading this emphatically radical interpretation of events, which contained a substantial attack on corporations, and the Bristol corporation in particular. It was not the "impartial account" that Place claimed. It concluded that:

"The whole of the evils were the result of tory misrule and the only circumstantial accounts that have been published are tory attempts falsely charging the crimes committed to the reformers whose proffered services to prevent mischief were rejected by the corporation". (116)

On the other hand, Place did use all the available contemporary accounts of the riots and an appendix contains the union's own narrative of its role. Whilst the union clearly exaggerated its own significance in putting down the riots, the substance of the union's defence of its actions is persuasive. Susan Thomas argues, (or at
least implies) that the riot was premeditated; that the political union for its own ends stirred the pot until it had 'spontaneously' boiled over and then offered to help re-establish order at a price, but this is unfair. At the root of the problem lay the ambiguous status of the union; the magistrates could not acknowledge them as an organization and even a whig like T.J. Manchee could refer to them as an "illegitimate body" and note "the arrogant and insolent tone" adopted in its handbills. It was clearly in the interests of reformers in the rest of the country to deny any political motivation to the riots and to diminish the involvement and credibility of Bristol's political union. Thus The Times commented a day after the riots that:

"Those who know how the unions of the North have been conducted... may judge whether the disastrous occurrences which have been communicated to us from Bristol could by possibility have there been witnessed had a political union, under the guidance of able and respected leaders, been in operation". (119)

But the problem at Bristol was not the lack of an effective and well-supported union. It had wished to make political capital out of Wetherell's visit to the town, which represented an opportunity to embarrass the corporation and show quite categorically the town's reforming zeal, but it only stood to gain from a popular demonstration which was maintained within controllable bounds. It was unfortunate that their own abdication of official responsibility, was a factor making control that much more difficult. Ironically the city establishment were in the end forced to rely on the union to help restore law and order; Herapath was invested with the authority of an under-sheriff whilst other members were sworn in as special constables. (120)

All accounts of the riots agree that had troops and/or the magistrates taken immediate forceful action, the outburst would have been only a minor incident. The post mortems, which began soon after the disturbances were quashed, echo down to today. There was an understandable desire, both at the time, and subsequently, to establish exactly where the blame lay. At the time the pendulum swung against Colonel Brereton. A preliminary enquiry convinced the army authorities that they should set up a court-martial to sit in judgement on Brereton, and during the subsequent court-martial in January 1832, he chose to shoot himself. In the face of damningly strong evidence, the verdict had been almost
certain to go against him. A later attempt by the crown to bring charges against Mayor Pinney and the other Bristol magistrates, for allegedly failing to do their duty during the disturbances, failed to secure a conviction. Both Pinney and Brereton deserve a degree of sympathy for the position in which they were placed. Unusually for the Tory Bristol Corporation, Pinney was a reformer. In September 1830 he presided at a Bristol meeting welcoming the July Revolution. But, in fact, neither side had confidence in him despite his generally recognized personal qualities.\(^\text{122}\) He had attempted to maintain an appearance of political neutrality after he became Mayor by refusing to show any public support for reform but because of this he was popularly regarded as having 'ratted', whilst local anti-reformers saw him as a trimmer. He was thus, as a sympathetic relative put it, "a mark for the fire of both sides".\(^\text{123}\) Moreover he lacked internal support within the corporation; according to John Ham:

"The Corporation wished to throw upon the mayor the onus of quelling what they called a Reform riot. They therefore willed him to give the order to the troops; his reply was understood to be 'No, all my other acts have been in council; hold a council and determine the point and I shall have no hesitation to give the order'. They refused to do so".\(^\text{124}\)

A recent survey of the evidence for and against the military commander concluded that:

"Thomas Brereton had the misfortune to find himself... in a most awkward place at a most difficult time. With luck he might have been a hero. Judged with compassion he almost qualifies as a martyr".\(^\text{125}\)

Having said this in extenuation, however, both the magistrates and the military can be held culpable for their actions, and this account will concur with the even-handed scorn of Major Beckwith, commander of the Gloucester Troops, who arrived in Bristol late on the Sunday afternoon. In the Home Office papers relating to the riots he comes across as an efficient, no-nonsense, character with scant respect for either the magistrates or Colonel Brereton. Unlike many of the participants in the subsequent post-mortems he had no particular axe to grind and did not need to be cautious and self-extenuating.\(^\text{126}\) He depicted the magistrates as cowering in the Council House, their main concern being to look after their own skins:

"I urged in the strongest possible manner that one or more magistrates should accompany me on horseback and
that I would be responsible for dispersing the mob and restoring the tranquility. They all refused to attend me, assigning as the reason that it would make them unpopular and would expose their property to be destroyed".

In later testimony, Beckwith said of the magistrates, "One referred to his house, another to his shipping - each seemed to have some personal motive for declining". He was equally withering about the handling of the military side of affairs expressing astonishment that the 14th cavalry troops had been removed, and rejecting Brereton's excuse that the safety of the troops was at risk, and that he had been unable to obtain permission from the magistrates to use force:

"I then expressed my opinion that the military were justified in using force to prevent plunder, riot, and destruction of property such as was happening before our eyes without authority from a magistrate and informed him that I was resolved to disperse by force anything like a riotous mob". (128)

The magistrates anticipated trouble and advised Wetherell to postpone his visit. Once he had decided to come, it would have been irresponsible if they had not requested a military force to be in attendance in the event of disturbances. It was unfortunate that to large sections of the community this seemed a provocative move, especially as the 14th Dragoons had a reputation for putting down riots throughout the West Country. Overall, however, it is difficult to defend most of the behaviour of the magistrates before and during the riots, and Major Beckwith later wrote that "of the contemptible conduct of the magistrates no one can entertain a stronger opinion than I do". The preparations as far as the provision of special constables were concerned, were totally inadequate; they failed in a clumsy attempt to enrol the port's sailors and eventually 300 patently unsuitable 'bludgeon-men' were engaged. During the early stages of the riot the irresponsible and provocative behaviour of these men actually served to accelerate the levels of violence. They made indiscriminate sallies into the crowd, "the conviction being pretty general that persons were selected at random". On the Sunday, even this unsatisfactory civil force disappeared, as they almost totally absented themselves from duty. The magistrates made no attempts to improvise a civil force, rejecting, for example, a proposal that the Sunday morning services in churches and chapels be used as an opportunity to recruit civilians into the ranks of a defence force. An immediate local
reaction to the disturbances was that:

"We have only the magistrates to blame for all that has taken place and I dare say that they will be under the necessity of resigning their gowns"

And the view of the Bristol Mercury was that "the riot commencing with their folly, was fostered by their indecision". Pinney admitted that, "I cannot say that any magistrate did accompany the troops at any moment during those three days". One might contrast this with what happened during the Toll-Bridge riots at Bristol in 1793, when the Major, the Sheriff, and five aldermen had accompanied the troops to the sound of pipes and drums in an impressive show of solidarity. There appears to have been total confusion at the Guild Hall and Council House. The magistrates had many plans before them but had decided on none. But the most damning aspect of the magistrates' behaviour was their consistent refusal to give Brereton specific orders to fire upon the mob if necessary. This refusal would have been forgivable if it had been through moral scruples, memories of the 1793 Toll-Bridge riots, or the mess that the magistrates had got into at Peterloo, but it seems that it was rather through timidity and a shirking of their responsibilities. As the Bristol Mercury put it:

"They contented themselves with issuing a general order, thinking thereby to screen themselves, on the one hand, from the responsibility resulting from a breach of the peace; and on the other, from the obloquy which they feared might follow any considerable sacrifice of human life".

The onus was on the magistrates to make a decision, but on the three occasions Brereton specifically asked to what extent he was to apply force, he did not receive a satisfactory answer. The Town Clerk, Sergeant Ludlow, in giving evidence to Brereton's Court-Martial admitted that he "was not aware that any explicit orders were given". By the time the magistrates were brought to trial, in September 1832, Brereton's suicide had already incriminated the military and made further investigations somewhat distasteful. The corporation successfully made Brereton the scapegoat - as the Bristol Mercury put it:

"Had he fired among the people, he would not have had their specific orders for the act; and failing to do so he had their orders to 'clear the streets'. "

It is possible then to sympathize with Colonel Brereton's main
defence at his Court Martial that he was working under a "magistracy from whom no essential aid could be procured", that all the orders he received were of "the most vague and indecisive nature", and therefore he could not be expected to proceed to extremities against the populace except under their specific directions. Moreover, in the wider context which Malcolm Thomis sets out, Brereton almost emerges as a figure of pathos. A man with honourable years of service in the West Indies, West Africa, and other outposts of the Empire was forced to turn to unpractised duties involving policing and crowd control. Such operations "demanded a tolerance and restraint unnatural for the soldier trained to kill the enemy" moreover, the memory of Peterloo inevitable affected the attitudes of the military towards the use of force in putting down popular demonstrations. It can be added that the citizens of Bristol showed no tendency to attach any blame to Brereton for his part in the disturbances - according to the Bristol Mercury, "he exerted himself in the most humane and laudable manner". But despite this background, it still has to be said that during the disturbances Brereton made errors of judgement which had serious consequences - hence the conclusion of the initial Court of Inquiry, that he did not show "that degree of judgement, activity and firmness which the circumstances under which he was placed ultimately required", was a fair one. There is no doubt that Brereton's professional advice increased the pressure upon the magistrates. As Sergeant Ludlow put it in his evidence at the Court Martial:

"Brereton frequently said that he was ready to obey the orders of the magistrates but at the same time he generally or always accompanied that with discouraging the use of force".

Brereton argued that the crowd would re-group in considerably increased number if they were dispersed by shooting, and also feared that the mob would be provoked to fire the banks and shipping - "of this intention they made no secret". The commanding officer seriously misjudged the temper of the crowd; in the drawing room of the Mansion House on the Saturday evening he said "that he had been shaking hands with the mob till his own arm had become tired", and that "if the rioters were left un-molested, he would be answerable for the peace of the city". The most disastrous decision made was to send the 14th Dragoons back to their quarters, although some of the 3rd Dragoon Guards remained. He justified the decision thus:
"I must apprise your lordship that the very revengeful disposition of the mob respecting the 14th is so strong and they, the mob, promised so urgently to disperse to their homes if the 14th should be withdrawn, whom they were otherwise determined to massacre... that I suggested... that it would be prudent to remove the 14th to Keynsham to which the magistrates agreed". (148)

This last claim was something of a distortion. According to the mayor's testimony to the Court of Inquiry "the magistrates remonstrated forcibly against this proposed movement" and refused to take responsibility for it, although they did give in to his suggestion. (148)

The withdrawal led to a major escalation in the destruction and the laying waste of all Bristol's public buildings. Brereton's excuse that "our military opposition could be but trifling" and that the cavalry were exhausted sounds lame. In a letter to his commanding officer, Beckwith wrote:

"There was from the beginning plenty of troops here to have prevented what has happened had they been properly employed, as was very well proved on Monday morning when the same squadron that had been ordered out of Bristol as being unable to protect itself from the Mob... in about an hour... completely dispersed and intimidated the mob." (150)

At a later court martial of Captain Warrington, a junior officer at Bristol, Major General Sir Charles Dalbiac convincingly argued that a commanding officer should not,

"place the witness of the civil power between himself and the personal responsibility of his station, and under the protection of such inertness... shelter himself from the blame and disgrace".

He further argued that it was the duty of any subject to help suppress riot and disturbance and that a soldier was no less a subject for being a soldier. (151) The Times could conclude after Brereton's suicide that:

"The unfortunate officer was not made of 'stuff stern enough' for the late crisis: the professional habits of the officer were overpowered by the benevolent feelings of the man". (152)

The effects of the riots at Bristol, and of major disturbances elsewhere, including Tiverton, Yeovil, Blandford, and Sherborne in the West Country and Nottingham, Derby, Loughborough and Worcester in the Midlands, (153) did not in the end seriously dent whig plans. Those places which suffered disturbances turned out to be
the exception rather than the rule. Things might have been different if there had been co-ordinated uprisings in the provinces or extensive rioting in London, since events at Nottingham and Bristol in particular, had indicated the inadequacy of the existing policing arrangements in provincial England. According to one contemporary estimate there were 7,000 soldiers in the London area for the defence of the capital; if they were occupied by demonstrations or threats to public order, this would have left a mere 4,000 men to cover the rest of the country. It is worth stressing, however, that the riots at Bristol did not occur until almost three weeks after the Lords rejection of the second reform bill and thus they were hardly a spontaneous political statement. In fact immediately after the rejection the town held a large reform meeting, attended by an estimated 3,000 people, which passed off completely peacefully. What riots there were tended to be isolated and undirected with no connecting links. The view of an older generation of historians that:

"never since 1688 had Great Britain been so near actual revolution as in 1831; never in all the troubles of the next two decades was she to come so near to it again" (156)

is a misreading of the political and social temperature of the country. This is not to deny that the riots caused undoubted alarm among both whig and tory politicians; Lord Greville reported that Melbourne had been "frightened to death" by the Bristol riots, and Sir Robert Peel genuinely seems to have feared for the safety of his children near Tamworth, "with the Birmingham Political Unions on one side, and Derby and Nottingham on the other", 157 but overall the government could take heart from the limited scale of the rioting, even in the face of such a flagrant obstruction of the wishes of the people. Michael Brock argues that the riots led to some reaction against reform and that the whig cabinet were led to adopt a more conservative position, 158 and it is probably true that events at Bristol heightened fears of property owners and re-kindled memories of the French Revolution. E.G. Wakefield's pamphlet Householders in Danger from the Populace published after the riots, sought to exploit such fears. But there was also a greater realization on the part of the whig government of their dependence upon the support of 'respectable' political unions. The Bristol riots, in drawing attention to the legitimacy and role of the political unions, seem to have promoted their development - many sprang up in the weeks
following the riots, especially in areas immediately surrounding Bristol such as Bath, Shepton Mallet, Taunton, and Gloucester. Several provincial newspapers took the view that the actions taken by the Bristol Political Union, in assisting the local magistrates in re-establishing peace, provided a wider demonstration that such organizations could serve as peace-keepers without representing a threat to established authority, and that middle-class reformers could now regard the establishment of political unions as a positive step to maintain law and order. In many important towns, including Leicester, Derby, Banbury, Norwich and Wolverhampton, unions appeared for the first time.

In the Summer of 1832, and the subsequent General Election in 1832 the social and political divisions in Bristol of 1812-1830 reappeared and there was a re-assertion of the social distance between wealthier 'respectable' reformers and the political union. In the crucial week of the Reform crisis in May 1832 the Political Union and the Reform Committee held separate meetings, and of the former meeting, the Bristol Mercury could comment:

"we cannot but regret that the meeting did not receive that countenance and direction from our wealthier fellow citizens which it most certainly was entitled to",

whilst at the meeting of the Reform Committee there were voices from the crowd that the resolutions were not strong enough.

The gulf was evident in two badly mismanaged events in June and August 1832 intended to celebrate the passing of the reform bill. The Reform Committee "wholly discountenanced" and refused to attend a reform procession in June, of about 12,000, but the polarization of reformers and the city's social divisions were more dramatically demonstrated by the failure of an open air dinner held on Brandon Hill. A Bristol radical warned the sponsoring Reform Committee of the dangers of,

"feasting surrounded by a hungry populace, who understand the dinner is by right for them, and who are unjustly deprived of it; are we to be surprised if their hunger urges them to lay violent hands on the victuals". (162)

The committee went ahead, however, and issued 6,000 tickets at 2s.6d. each, tables were erected and covered with white calico and the meal was scheduled to start at 2 o'clock. What the organizers had not bargained for was the arrival of an estimated 20,000 uninvited guests. A local analyst described the subsequent scenes thus:
The places were occupied by crowds of hungry men, women and children who had seated themselves unasked to the feast, and who commenced a fierce attack upon the eatables. The mob helped themselves, freely, plates were thrown in the air, whole joints were carried off, and the drink was monopolized by those who fought most lustily for it, barrels were rolled away to various parts of the hill, and the contents drunk from basins, cups, hands, and hats." (163)

The fiasco is largely explicable as opportunist plundering, but it is not fanciful to detect a political dimension. There was a sense in which the Reform Committee became in a way a surrogate, in the consciousness of the working classes, for the exclusiveness of a reform that they had previously supported. A radical element seceded from the union, believing that the reform bill was insufficiently wide-ranging, and unhappy when the union leadership invited Edward Protheroe to serve as their honorary chairman. Protheroe's dealings with the Home Office in putting down the riots had alienated some who shared the frustration of the mob. A formal break occurred with the establishment of a Bristol branch of the National Union of the Working Class, which published a weekly local paper in Bristol, The Reporter from at least 1 Sept. 1832 – 4 May 1833. The passage of the Reform Bill, and the whig/liberal split at the 1832 General Election were seized upon by Herapath and Ham as a convenient excuse for dissolving the political union. The West India whig J.E. Baillie was reluctant to form a coalition with Protheroe similar to that which had swept them to power in 1831, and the latter had been tainted by his involvement with the disastrous open-air dinner. The formal ending of the whig/liberal alliance came when the liberals picked the London attorney John Williams as their second candidate. The tory Sir Richard Vyvyan and Baillie were elected, as Bristol's traditional electoral practices reasserted themselves.

Popular pressure thus played a significant part in the Reform Bill's passage, and a young J.S. Mill was "convinced that we are indebted for the preservation of tranquillity solely to the organization of people in political unions." Reform excitement was widespread, especially in October 1831 at the time of the Bristol riots; it was no usual state of affairs when stones were hurled at leading figures such as the Duke of Wellington and the Marquis of Londonderry, and when bishops were scared of showing their faces in their Sees. For most, the perpetual agitation was something new; a late nineteenth century Newcastle antiquarian recalled of his childhood:
"Public meetings in Newcastle seem then to have been invented. You can easily conceive that before the passing of the Reform Bill, a town destitute of religious and benevolent societies would have but few occasions for meeting together in large numbers..." (169)

Perhaps the main reason that the indignation and disappointment resulting from the Lords rejection did not translate itself into violent demonstrations was that people simply did not believe that the bill would not eventually pass. This in itself was a tribute to the momentum that reformist pressure had built up. As the *Tyne Mercury* put it:

"There was a general expression of regret that the Lords had shown themselves so indifferent to the just expectations of the people... and a settled conviction that notwithstanding the obstacles thrown in its way, the Bill must eventually be passed". (169)

At Birmingham the bells were tolled all night after the news had been received and there was a protest meeting at which 100,000 people are said to have attended, but there was no trouble to speak of. In Leeds a correspondent of *The Times* reported that whilst the rejection produced a strong sensation, "it was 'deep' rather than 'loud'. We have not during the whole week had anything like riot or excess." (170) Reform pressure groups had three main functions: to create and educate public opinion, to demonstrate this opinion legally, and to maintain the pressure of enthusiasm. The degree of success that they enjoyed at York, Newcastle, and Bristol varied, but all three cities, for all the divisions amongst reformers, contributed something to what added up to an impressive national popular political movement.
FOOTNOTES:


2. P.D. Hansard, 3rd. ser., i, 52-3 (Nov 2 1830)


6. Place MSS B.L. Add MS 27790 Francis Place to William Herapath 10 April 1834.


9. Place MSS B.L. Add MS 35148 f. 67-68 Francis Place to Joseph Hume 1 November 1830.

11. P.P. (1830-31) III pp.421-432; Report of the Select Committee appointed to examine the petitions in favour of reform presented between 5 November 1830 and 4 March 1831.


14. Henry, Earl Grey (ed.) The Reform Act, 1832 : The Correspondence of the late Earl Grey with His Majesty King William IV and with Sir Herbert Taylor (London, 1867) Grey to Sir Herbert 13 Jan.1831 I pp.51-52. Similar sentiments were expressed in letters on 15 Jan. and 21 Feb. 1831 pp.65-66,133. In the former he recorded : "I am myself convinced that public opinion is so strongly directed to this question, and so general, that it cannot be resisted without the greatest danger of leaving the government in a situation in which it would be deprived of all authority and strength".  


16. This is an argument developed by D.Fraser, "The Agitation for Parliamentary Reform" in J.T.Ward (ed.) Popular Movements 1830-50 (1973).


19. P.D. III 16 April 1832, 580.

21. e.g. Parkes MSS Lord Althorp to Joseph Parkes, 2, 24 Nov. 1831. Russell was taken to task, for using such an emotive phrase, in the House of Commons on 12 October by the Tories Sir Henry Hardinge, Sir Richard Vyvyan and Henry Goulburn [PD VIII Cols. 596-615]. Lord Melbourne at one point asked Place to use his influence to end sporadic outbreaks of violence in agricultural districts, G.M. Trevelyan, Lord Grey of the Reform Bill (1920) p.286.

22. P.D. IX 6 Dec. 1831, 4-5.


25. Ibid., p.411.

26. The laws relating to political societies came from two statutes 39 Geo III c.79 (July 1799) and 57 Geo. III c.19 (March 1817). c.f. F. Place, Political Unions not contrary to Law : The King’s Proclamation Examined (1831).


29. c.f. J. Hamburger, James Mill and the Art of Revolution (New Haven, 1963), pp.212-244. After 1832 railways began to permit a more rapid concentration of troops for the purposes of domestic suppression; see F. C. Mather, Public Order in the Age of the Chartists (Manchester, 1958) pp.161-164. For the King’s requests for an expansion of the army see H. Grey (ed.) Op.Cit., pp.40, 402.


31. e.g. Ibid., f.560-561.


34. J. Hamburger, Op.Cit., explored this aspect of the reform agitation in some detail.


36. Yorkshire Gazette 26 Sept., 1829, 26 June 1830.

37. Ibid., 5, 12 March; 13 Oct. 1831; 12, 19 May 1832.

38. Morning Chronicle 21 May 1832; P.D.XII 18 May 1832 Col.1045; H.O. 52/20 Archbishop of York to Lord Harewood 16 May 1832.
39. Wyvill MSS ZFW 7/1 Handbill containing York Whig Club's declaration.

40. H. Bellerby (pr.) 1830 York Poll Book (York, 1830); York Herald 24 Nov. 1832.

41. The Times 10 March 1831.

42. York Herald 11 Dec 1830; 1, 8 Jan. 1831.

43. e.g. Ibid., 12 March, 15 Oct. 1831.

44. Ibid., 24 Sept., 1831.

45. Ibid., 5 May 1832.

46. H.O. 40/30 (2) J. Cobbe (Royal Household Artillery, Major commanding at York) to General Bouverie 17 May 1832; Place MSS (microfilm) Vol.6, Part 7 pp.114-120.

47. Newcastle Journal 19 May 1832.


55. Tyne Mercury 16 March 1830.

56. Ibid., 7, 14 Sept. 1830; A. Aspinall (ed.) The Correspondence of Charles Arbuthnot (Camden Society, 3rd. series, JXV (1941) p.134. Buddle was a Newcastle coal owner and viewer to the Tory Lord Londonderry.

57. Cowen MSS (Tyne & Wear Record Office) 634/c.196 Thomas Doubleday to Joseph Cowen 4 Oct. 1858.


59. Tyne Mercury 14, 21 December 1830; E. Hughes, Losh II p.104. [For local disagreements on the ballot question c.f. J. Losh,


61. For pen portraits of the leaders of the Northern Political Union c.f. Fraser's Magazine VIII December 1833 (see below p. 267). For further references see below p. 685-699.


63. Brougham MSS James Losh to Lord Brougham 11 Nov. 1831.

64. Wilson Collection (Newcastle City Library) III f. 709; The Objects and Rules of the Northern Political Union passed at a meeting held in the Music Hall on Mon. 27 June 1831, with the declaration of the council of the union (1831).

65. Tyne Mercury 18 Sept. 1832.


68. Objects and Rules of the Northern Political Union... p. 20.

69. Newcastle Courant 2 July 1831.

70. e.g. What Good will the Reform Bill do? A Dialogue between a member of the Political Union and a working mechanic (Newcastle, 1832).

71. Quoted in P. Cadogan, Early Radical Newcastle (Consett, 1975) p. 66.

72. Newcastle Courant 22 October 1831. The Tyne Mercury estimated the crowd as being between 40-80,000 (19 Oct. 1831).

73. For an interesting outside view of the miner's dispute c.f. H.O 40/29(i) Col. Sir H. W. Ross to General Bouverie 4 April 1831.

74. E. Hughes, Losh II pp. 143-144. He quoted the figure of 10,000 for the May meeting. For an alternative view of the North-East working classes in 1831 which grants them a more political voice c.f. D. Ridley, 'The Durham and Northumberland Miners' Strikes of 1831' [University of Durham, Ph.D., in preparation].

75. c.f. Brockett MSS (Gateshead Public Library) II f. 391 Cuthbert Rippon to Eneas Mackenzie 2 September 1831.

76. Tyne Mercury 2 August 1831.

77. J. Sykes, Local Records, or Historical Register of Remarkable Events which have occurred in Northumberland and Durham (Newcastle,
1833) II pp.313-15; Lambton MSS Charles Atwood to Lord Durham 19 April 1832. c.f. the Newcastle demonstration on coronation day, 28 June 1838, J.Knott, Popular Opposition to the 1834 Poor Law (1986) p.4.

78. Tyne Mercury 27 Sept., 1 Nov.1831; E.Hughes, Losh II pp.120-121.


80. Durham Chronicle 18 May 1832.

81. Objects and Rules of the Northern Political Union... p.7.

82. E.Hughes, Losh II Larkin's speech is printed in the Newcastle Courant, 19 May 1832. Londonderry's clash with Grey on the issue on 25 May 1832, is in Holland's (3rd ser.) xiii, 98-111. Cf. Lord Holland's diary, 25 May 1832 : Kriegel, Holland House Diary, pp.185-6.


84. P.D. V 27 April 1831, 512.

85. The Times 2 May 1831; Morning Chronicle 2 May 1831.


87. See the Timetable of Events from 29-31 October at the end of these footnotes.

88. Of contemporary accounts, the most widely read and distributed were W.H.Somerton, Narrative of the Bristol Riots on the 29th, 30th and 31st of October, 1831 (Bristol, 1831); T.J.Manchee, The Origin of the riots of Bristol and the causes of the subsequent outrages (Bristol, 1831); Rev.J.Eagles, The Bristol Riots, their causes, progress, and consequences (Bristol, 1832); "What caused the Bristol riots?", Blackwoods Magazine March 1832. There are several collections of newspaper extracts, reports, and handbills relating to the riots of 1831 in the Bristol Reference Library - e.g. B4782, B 7426. The best available modern account is A.P.Hart, "The Bristol Riots and the mass media" (Oxford, D.Phil., 1979). Also useful are S.Thomas, The Bristol Riots (Bristol, 1974) and M.Harrison, Crowds and History, Mass Phenomena in English Towns, 1790-1835 (Cambridge, 1988) pp.289-314. G.Amey, City under fire : the Bristol riots and aftermath (London, 1979) is a popular journalistic account.


93. G. Bush, Op. Cit., pp. 10, 89. According to the historian of Southampton, the Corporation there "vegetated rather somnolently through the even tenor of an existence", and he comments of the local government system, which was very similar to Bristol's, "At best the apparatus was a clumsy, cumbersome and creaking set of machinery". [A.T. Patterson (ed.) A Selection from the Southampton Corporation Journals, 1815-35, and Borough Council Minutes, 1835-47 (1965) p. xv]. The story of unrepresentativeness, extravagant feasting and inefficiency is also true of Newcastle [M. Cooke, "The Last Days of the Unreformed Corporation of Newcastle-Upon-Tyne", Archaeologia Aeliana XXXVII (1961) pp. 207-228].


95. Bristol Mercury 19 May 1832. There is additional evidence of the effects of the economic recession in the Poor Man's Guardian 18 Aug. 1832; also see B. D. G. Little, The City and County of Bristol (1954) pp. 238-239.

96. The Times 3 Oct. 1831. Wetherell only narrowly got the job as Bristol's Recorder as "some members of the corporation appear to have had presentiments as to the danger of appointing a violent political partisan" (J. Latimer, Op. Cit., p. 118).

97. P.D. 6 27 Aug 1831 Cols 698-699: Protheroe subsequently rose to deny that the feelings of the people of Bristol in favour of the reform bill were in any way decreasing, but the damage had already been done to Bristol's reputation. The speaker had once remarked that Wetherell's only lucid interval was the gap which opened during his speeches between his waistcoat and trousers, (J. Cannon, Op. Cit., p. 219.)


101. Trial of Charles Pinney Esq... p. 96; H. O. 40/28 f. 171 Major Mackworth to Lord Fitzroy Somerset 3 Nov. 1831.

102. Riots, 1831, MSS material (Bristol Reference Library 24936) John Ham to Francis Place 10 Aug. 1835.

103. Ibid.; Also see, Rules and Orders of the Bristol General Union
Established 7 June 1831 (Bristol, 1832). D.Vickery, A Bristol Calendar 1824-1835 (MS copy) p.234.

104. **Bristol Mercury** 31 May 1831.


106. **Bristol Mercury** 14 June, 14 Dec. 1831.

107. **Bristol Gazette** 28 April 1831.

108. Ibid., 27 Jan. 1831.


110. Ibid.; H.O. 40/28 f.9-10 Lord Fitzroy Somerset to Lord Melbourne.

111. Riots, 1831, MSS material, J. Ham to Francis Place 10 Aug. 1835; Herapath to Daniel 26 Oct. 1831.

112. 'Narrative of the Bristol General Union in Connection with the late Bristol Riots', *Place MSS* B.L. Add MSS 27790 f. 184 et.seq.

113. Handbill circulated on 25 Oct. 1831 signed by the then secretary of the union J. P. Venn, quoted in Anon, *A Hint from Bristol; or What Should Honest Men Do Now?...* (1831)

114. **Bristol Mercury** 1 Nov. 1831.

115. **Bristol Gazette** 24 Nov. 1831; H.O. 40/28(1) Major Beckwith to Lord Hill 2 Nov. 1831.

116. *Place MSS* B.L. Add MSS 27790


120. c.f. *Place Collection*, Set 63 f. 55, Handbill 3 Nov. 1831 'To the Inhabitants of London, from the Bristol Political Union'.

121. The *Times* 7 Nov. 1831.

123. Pinney MSS (University of Bristol Library) T4/3 Mary Ames to Fanny Smith 8 Nov. 1831.


126. It is natural, of course, to display oneself in a favourable light, but Beckwith did not exaggerate his personal role. The same cannot be said of the contemporary account of Major Mackworth (1831) A Personal Narrative of the Late Events in Bristol which is self-important and gives the impression that he was at the hub of events.

127. P.R.O. H.O. 40/29 (1), Memorandum of Occurrences at Bristol, 1 November 1831; H.O. 52/15, Proceedings of the Court of Inquiry into events at Bristol.

128. H.O. 40/28 (1)


130. S. Thomas, The Bristol Riots (Bristol, 1974) p.4.

131. Morning Chronicle 15 April 1836.


134. H.O. 52/12 Report of Solicitors to Committee of Inquiry into events at Bristol (the solicitors were employed by the political union). p.11.

135. The Times 3 Nov. 1831; Bristol Mercury 1 Nov. 1831.

136. H.O. 52/15 Mayor Pinney's Testimony to the court of Inquiry.


140. Ibid.,

141. Ibid.,

142. H.O. 40/28 (1) Letter from Brereton to Lord Fitzroy - Somerset 3 Nov. 1831; H.O. 52/15 Brereton's defence at the preliminary Court of Inquiry.
M. I. Thomis, Op. Cit., p.318-320. The memory of Peterloo was not restricted to the military. A flood of caricatures appeared in the press showing fat, drunken soldiery hacking down defenceless ranks of women and children and such evocative images stayed in the minds of both the working classes and the magistracy all over the country. (c.f. D. Read, Peterloo, The 'Massacre' and its Background (1958) pp.206-208).

Bristol Mercury 1 Nov.1831.

H.O. 52/12 Conclusion of the Court of Inquiry 17-24 Nov.1831.

The Times 11 Jan.1832; H.O. 40/28(1) Letter from Brereton to Lord Fitzroy-Somerset 3 Nov.1831.

H.O. 52/15 Mayor Pinney's testimony to the Court of Inquiry 17-24 Nov.1831.


H.O. 52/15 Mayor Pinney's testimony to the Court of Inquiry 17-24 Nov.1831.

H.O. 40/28(1) Brereton to Lord Fitzroy-Somerset 31 Oct.1831; Major Beckwith to Lord Hill 2 Nov.1831.


The Times 14 Jan.1832.


M.I.Thomis and D.Holt, Threats of Revolution in Britain 1789-1848 (1977) p.98.

The Times 18 Oct.1831.


e.g. East Anglian 8 Nov.1831; Lincoln, Rutland, and Stamford Mercury 11 Nov.1831; Sheffield Independent 29 Jan.1832.

Bristol Mercury, 16, 23, 30 June 1832.

Ibid., 23 June 1832.

Bristol Mercury 11 Aug. 1832.
163. D. Vickery, A Bristol Calendar 1824-1835 (MS copy) pp. 336-337; For outraged newspaper reports see Bristol Mercury, Bristol Journal 18 Aug. 1832.

164. For additional information as to the activities of the National Union of the Working Class at Bristol c.f. D. Large, Radicalism in Bristol in the Nineteenth Century (Bristol, 1981) pp. 11-13.


168. J. Collingwood Bruce, Old Newcastle (Newcastle, 1904) p. 96.


The political career of John Fife (1795-1871), a distinguished Newcastle surgeon, has been represented in more than one general survey of the period, as typifying the drift to the right of professional men in the provinces during the 1830's. One of the chief organizers and outspoken orators of the Northern Political Union during the reform agitation of 1831-32, Fife was the champion of order in the Summer of 1839 and was knighted for his services as Mayor of Newcastle in putting down Chartist activities in the town.

The most recent local historian of Tyneside radicalism in the early nineteenth century, whilst adding additional flesh to the bones of the above account, does not alter its basic outlines; "with the passage of the [Reform] Bill, Fife began to fall away from the cause of electoral reform". His career showed that "the 'progressive' of one year might easily be the 'reactionary' of the next". Fife's contrasting roles during two key periods of active campaigning for political change attracted the notice of contemporaries as much as they have enticed historians. By radicals he was predictably branded a traitor and an apostate; one correspondent wrote to the Chartist newspaper, the Northern Liberator, following the so-called 'Battle of the Forth':

"I never believed it possible that John Fife would, with his own hands, seize upon and break to pieces, a banner he himself had often and enthusiastically marched under; or that he would order policemen to stab their fellow-men for doing merely that which he himself had told them a hundred times to do". (3)

Fife's actions as Mayor gave rise to bitter feelings. R.G.Gammage, an early historian of the Chartist movement, commented:

"this man had formerly been one of the loudest advocates of the right of public meeting; but then it was to serve the purposes of the middle class". (4)

Since Fife's career is cited as a dramatic exemplification of a national trend, it is important to have a clear and accurate account of his political activities in the 1830's. This chapter, whilst outlining the main developments on the liberal side of politics in Newcastle, will re-assess the conventional view of Fife, and seek to restore him as a central figure in Tyneside and radical politics in the 1830's. A contemporary biographical sketch of Fife described him thus:

"...by far the most popular man of his time among the middle and working classes of this smoky and manufacturing borough... no man living can deny that, from 1834 to 1838, Sir John Fife, Knight and Alderman, was immeasurably superior to any other person in ruling the popular will of the town of Newcastle". (5)
This is not a view of Fife often found in the historical literature. Far from being typical of a drift to the right among the liberal middle classes, Fife laboured long and hard in the radical cause in the 1830's. The easy thing to do would have been to have dropped out of politics altogether, to concentrate on a successful professional career, or to have joined the mainstream whig supporters who dominated the Reformed Town Council after 1835. Fife, however, did not choose the easy option. The accusations of selling out and apostasy which were periodically thrown at him throughout the decade, were the price to be paid for attempting to build and maintain bridges between the whig and radical factions on Tyneside.

The contribution of John Fife within the Northern Political Union (N.P.U.) in 1831-32 as a tactician, organizer and eloquent speaker has been well-documented. He played a crucial role in cementing the precarious reform alliance which stretched from moderate whigs like James Losh to extreme radicals such as Charles Larkin. After the passing of the Reform Act in July 1832, individuals such as William Cobbett and Rowland Detroisier, Secretary of the London-based National Political Union, on visits to the North-East, noted that as a result of newspaper reports of the northern union's activities, the names of Fife, Larkin, Thomas Doubleday and Charles Attwood had been on many people's lips. In Cobbett's view the speeches and proceedings at key public meetings organized by the Union "absolutely gave a tone to the whole country" and their names "became familiar in the mouths of even the chopsticks of Sussex and Kent". The leading metropolitan whig newspaper, the Morning Chronicle at one point during the reform crisis quoted part of a speech by Fife in its editorial column. He had spelled out the consequences at a meeting on 18 April 1832, if the Tory opponents of reform should so amend the bill as to destroy it:

"No longer will I pay taxes in money (cheers) - let them seize my goods (cheers) I am prepared to endure the last extremity (cheers) eternal banishment (cheers) - death itself (cheers) - rather than be the willing slave of a tyrannical unprincipled Tory Administration (long, continual cheering)".

The Chronicle took this melodramatic speech to be representative of the opinions of the people at large -

"We do not believe these are mere threats. We are of the opinion that the people, if disappointed in their expectations, will do what they say..." (8)

Radical leaders were treading a very fine line in the years 1831-32 -
they used the language of menace to put pressure on the government and to convey the impression of a discontented people ready and impatient to break out into action, and yet they did not want to provoke the people into actually putting their threats into effect.  

John Fife was never an advocate of 'physical force'. For example, at a reform meeting in October 1831 after the House of Lords had rejected the reform bill, a banner read 'Londonderry found, and no brains' and on the pole from which this flag waved were suspended a brace of horns and a pair of pistols. This was a reference to an attack on the anti-reforming County Durham peer. Fife regretted the circumstances out of which the idea had arisen - "That man who threw the stone at the Marquis of Londonderry was no reformer". Nevertheless, Fife's speech at a notorious meeting in the Spital, Newcastle on 15 May 1832 gave a strong hint as to the possible necessity of resort to force. He quoted from a speech by Charles James Fox against the Sedition Bills of 1795 to the effect that parliament might pass bills so unconstitutional that obedience was no longer a moral duty and insurrection became justifiable. Thousands of men raised their right arms in a silent pledge of strength. Fife added, subsequently, that

"recourse to violence is the last and worst resort. The House of Commons yet stands between this country and a revolution",

but he clearly came closer, on this occasion, to advocating armed resistance than in retrospect he could feel comfortable about.

The point at which active resistance to what was perceived as an unjust law became justifiable was also to be an issue in the summer of 1839.

Less well-documented than Fife's work within the N.P.U., is the fact that he continued to exert his charm, diplomacy and organizational abilities in the radical cause long after 1832. The two most influential sources as to Fife's political career in the 1830's are an article written for the Northern Tribune magazine, as part of a series entitled 'Democracy in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne' in 1854, and Richard Welford's biographical portrait in Men of Mark 'Twixt Tyne and Tweed. The former article showed that Fife resigned from the N.P.U. on 13 June 1832, less than a week after the Reform Bill became law, and quoted his letter of resignation verbatim. Discussions and disagreements among the radical leaders, particularly Fife and Attwood, were emphasized, and although there were many solicitations to induce Fife to retract, with Doubleday leading
attempts at mediation, these were said to have been to no avail. The Tribune further commented portentously,

"reference to the political records in our possession enable us further to elucidate the causes which led to his leaving the council".

These causes included Fife's support for the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act, which put him at variance with other radical leaders. It was noted that the Act emanated from the Whigs - the same party which conferred a Knighthood upon Fife in 1840, and the article further pointed out that he was opposed to physical force for the advancement of institutional reform. The whole emphasis of the article was to brand Fife a closet Whig, although there was little internal logic to any of its argument. Fife would have needed to possess considerable powers of foresight to have known about the Poor Law legislation in 1832. In any case, although he did dissent from those radical leaders who wished to use the 1834 enactment as ammunition against the Whigs, his support for the legislation was insufficient in the later 1830's to disqualify him as a radical leader. Fife's stance was undoubtedly unpopular - for example, his name was hissed and booed at a public meeting of the ratepayers of the united parishes of Newcastle in March 1838 who were campaigning to elect Poor Law Guardians pledged to resist all attempts to build a workhouse. But opposition to the New Poor Law has been shown not to have had the same vehemence in the North-East as in some other parts of the country, because of the comparatively healthy state of the local economy and the sensitive implementation of legislation by the authorities. James Ayre, a local mason and later a prominent Chartist, expressed the hope at the above meeting that Fife's "was only a temporary lapse, and that he would soon again be found among the ranks of his old friends the people (hear, hear). Fife's fears concerning the use of physical force were shared to an even greater extent by Charles Attwood and most of the other leaders of the N.P.U. The Northern Tribune represented an early, and comparatively short-lived, sortie into radical journalism by a youthful Joseph Cowen. It supported Republican principles and was produced with the assistance of experienced Chartist campaigners. Not surprisingly, the magazine published a very partial, emphatically radical, account of the development of democracy in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, which was intended to serve the circumstances in which it was written. The 1832 Reform Act had made room for "Big Whigs at Westminster and Little Whigs in Newcastle" and as usual "the Whigs afterwards betrayed the
Democrats".  

Welford's biographical sketches are an invaluable source for eighteenth and nineteenth century North-East historians and his portrait of Fife is more scrupulous, but it nevertheless contains significant omissions and emphases (perhaps partly because the Tribune was one of his sources). He gives a confused account of the N.P.U. in the aftermath of the Reform Bill; on the one hand, in his portrait of Attwood, he notes:

"Fife and the Whigs were satisfied; Attwood, Doubleday, and Larkin accepted it as an instalment only of greater reforms to come. Hence arose dissensions and the breaking up of the Union".

On the other hand, in the sketch of Fife, there is an acknowledgement that Fife was still an avowed reformer after he left the Union and a reference to his authorship of a political pamphlet in favour of household suffrage, triennial parliaments, and the secret ballot. Welford also includes in his portrait of Fife a favourable description by John Selkirk, a reporter of the proceedings of the Town Council, which defended him from charges of political apostasy, and Fife's own defence of his actions as Mayor in 1839:

"Holding as I then did, and trust ever shall, the same principles and regard to popular rights, my position was peculiarly delicate, and indeed painful; but no other course remained to the magistrates than to act with decision."

Elsewhere, however, Welford describes him as "not the most daring or the most enduring" of reformers and tends to shuffle him onto the sidelines, by concentrating on his role in promoting municipal reform. Fife was indeed active in this field and made several pointed interventions, for example, at the Municipal Commissioners' Enquiry into the existing state of Newcastle's corporation in November 1833. In the reformed council he was a leading advocate of the dismantlement of the Mansion House Establishment. But his activity in municipal affairs did not divert him from other causes. One tends to forget that Welford was a historical participant in his own right. He arrived in Newcastle as a seventeen year old in March 1854 and worked on the Newcastle Daily Chronicle, latterly as a sub-editor, for nearly eight years. He was active in the establishment and organization of the Northern Reform Union from 1858-62 and was a friend of R.G.Gammage, the subsequent Chartist historian. The Fife that he knew stood aloof from the Northern Reform Union "assuming the attitude of offended dignity" (although Fife did apparently speak at a meeting in connection with the Reform Union early in 1859). In the
wake of his 'betrayal' of 1839, it is perhaps hardly surprising
that Fife's radical inclinations before this date were minimized.
It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Fife has suffered for
being out of step with the prevailing Cowenite orthodoxy on more
than one question in the 1850's. For example, both Doubleday and Att-
wood were supporters of David Urquhart and shared Cowen's Russo-
phobia, whilst Doubleday and Larkin were active supporters of the
Northern Reform Union. Both Larkin and Attwood had patchy political
records in the 1830's. Larkin failed in two journalistic ventures
and his high-flown, exaggerated, rhetoric effectively marginalized
him as a potent political force. He was absent from Chartist plat-
forms in the late 1830's and was later an advocate of the more
moderate complete suffrage Union proposed by Joseph Sturge. By
the end of the 1830's Attwood was an advocate of Tory Radicalism.
Sir Thomas Liddell, a detested adversary of North-East Whigs and
Radicals, had written to Lord Londonderry of Attwood after sharing a
coach with him in July 1838 :

"...He hates Lord Durham and in spite of his radical
propensities has a powerful vein of Conservative
feeling which pervades his very visionary mind..." (22)

By June 1840 Attwood was corresponding with a young Benjamin
Disraeli :

"...your parliamentary course induces me to regard
you as one of those whose efforts must be and will
be essentially contribute to the redemption of your
country in unison with a new party of Conservatives -
which shall embrace the radical masses." (23)

But it was Fife rather than Larkin or Attwood, who was excluded
from the Cowenite hall of reforming fame.

Fife did not, in fact, resign from the executive council of
the N.P.U. in June 1832 "because he disagreed with the radical
majority who wanted further reform". He resigned because of a
temporary disagreement with Charles Attwood as to the tactics of
the Union, and a clash over a matter of personal principle. They
had differed early in May 1832 at a time of great political excite-
ment, after the House of Lords had again rejected the Reform Bill,
when Fife had urged the council of the union that there should be
an immediate demonstration of strength. Attwood had accused Fife
of injuring the Union by his expression of Republican sentiments
and his declaration not to pay taxes. He feared that by the time
they held a meeting Wellington might be in office, and would con-
ceivably send in the dragoons. He thus gave his casting vote against
a meeting, (in his old age it was his role in calming potentially revolutionary agitation that Attwood recalled most vividly).\textsuperscript{25} In fact the Union's hand was forced when it was discovered that Newcastle Whigs were planning a meeting of their own, and thus a joint meeting went ahead on 15 May. In his letter of resignation Fife wrote:

"Mr. Attwood required from me a declaration that I would not at any future time attempt to make the Union the tool of the Whigs; I appealed to my character and conduct against so insulting a suspicion, but without hesitation gave my pledge".

In return he asked for a declaration that Attwood would not make the Union the tool of William Cobbett, which Attwood refused. The resignation had nothing to do with "his Whig belief that parliamentary representation had now become adequate".\textsuperscript{26} At the end of his letter, Fife added his assurance that so long as the Union continued to advocate his own principles of universal suffrage, annual parliaments and vote by ballot, it had his best wishes.\textsuperscript{27} What none of the existing accounts add, is that Fife rejoined the N.P.U. only a month or two later. After reading the article in the Northern Tribune in 1854, Fife confirmed in a letter published in a subsequent number of the monthly magazine, that he was soon back in harness with Attwood. Not only did he vote a 'plumper' for Attwood at the General Election in December 1832, but he campaigned in Newcastle on his behalf and proposed him at the nomination of candidates before the opening of the poll.\textsuperscript{28} At public meeting on the Town Moor on 27 May 1833 to petition parliament for a radical reform in the representation of the people, a reduction in taxes and the abolition of the Corn Laws, and which further called upon the King to dismiss his "imbecile ministry", John Fife addressed an estimated crowd of 10,000 people thus:

"Your crowd is weeded of all those timid, self-interested half-Whig, Men, who have not the spirit of democratic principles, who are but fine weather reformers, and who swelled your numbers on former occasions, though they were mere tools of the Whig Aristocracy. You are stronger without them. Your masses today contain none but the best". (29)

In January 1833 James Losh had written to Lord Brougham:

"I am glad to find the Union here is about to adopt petitions etc. of so violent a description, that I do not suppose many of their more moderate allies, who joined their standard in the heat of resentment, will concur with them". (30)

Fife was not one of these moderates - at least in the sense meant by Losh.
An unsympathetic biographical sketch of Fife which appeared in Frazer's Edinburgh Magazine in December 1833 admitted that the N.P.U. "owes its origin and success principally to his exertions" and that he was "by far the most able member". By supporting the Union as he did, Fife was said to have lost over two-thirds of his medical practice, as disgruntled patients turned elsewhere.\(^{31}\)

Fife owed much of his popularity and influence to his eloquence as an orator. He possessed a clear, calm voice, an equable temper and "a style of gentlemanly ease". The quality of public speaking in the early nineteenth century was by no means always high - recalling his attendance at public meetings in Newcastle in his youth, John Collingwood Bruce noted:

"The men of the town were not practised in oratory and hence for the most part, as I remember, they hammered and stammered considerably upon the platform. A man was looked upon with something like awe who could get through a speech creditably". (32)

Part of the key to Fife's success seems to have been that he did not talk down to people - "mixing freely with operatives of every kind, he never reduced his style to theirs".\(^{33}\) He was regularly in contact with the mining population on Tyneside, as a medical and surgical adviser to some of the principal coal proprietors of the North-East, and it was in this way the he had come to meet Tommy Hepburn, the leader of the pitmen.\(^{34}\) His eloquence was more than merely a helpful aid to popularity - he actually had the power to change the direction of debates, since his opinions on divisive political questions carried a great deal of weight. For example, at a meeting of burgesses in June 1835 to take into consideration the Whig government's plan of municipal reform, in so far as it tended to reduce the rights and privileges of the freemen, John Hodgson, a former and future M.P., called for opposition to the legislation and seemed to have the feeling of the meeting on his side, but it was swayed by the opposing sentiments of Fife, himself a freeman and steward of the Barber Surgeon's Company since 1821.\(^{35}\) And at a well advertised public meeting of the Radical Reformers' Association and working men of Newcastle, held in the Groat Market on 6 February 1837, there were fiery speeches in favour of resolutions calling for universal suffrage, the ballot, and abolition of the property qualification for M.P.s, but Fife persuaded the meeting to vote for an amendment accepting that for tactical reasons the changes might have to be brought about in a
series of small steps. In the wake of Lord John Russell's 'Finality' declarations in November 1837, ruling out further reforms in the representation of the people, Fife's name was at the head of 542 requisitionists for a public meeting to consider what steps should be taken to demonstrate opposition to Russell's (and by implication the Whig government's) thinking. Fife arrived late at the meeting in the Guildhall hall on 4 December, and a speech by Doubleday was interrupted by the applause which greeted his entrance. Towards the end of the proceedings he rose at the call of the meeting amidst shouts of "Fife, Fife, Fife" and further applause. His speeches were clearly worth listening to and he was loudly called for by crowds at the close of the polling at the General Elections of December 1832 and January 1835 and a by-election in July 1836.

There is plenty of evidence to indicate that working men who held radical political views looked upon Fife as their leading advocate in the mid 1830's. At a meeting 'of the unrepresented classes of the North of England' held on the Town Moor on Monday 19 May 1834, a national holiday, Fife's identification with the cause of the working classes was striking. He spoke in favour of Trades' Unions and characterized as "atrocious" the legal proceedings and penalties inflicted upon the six Dorchester Labourers in consequence of their conviction and expatriation for the supposed administering of secret oaths, (men who subsequently became known as the 'Tolpuddle Martyrs'). Their treatment was compared to that of a peer of the realm who interfered in elections, whose conduct was not even allowed to be enquired into unless security was given of £2,000 in bonds - "so long as the working classes were unrepresented, so long would the government legislate, not for the people, but for those who were represented". He dismissed arguments that the working classes were unfit to exercise the elective franchise because of their poverty, arguing that although undeniably the poorest they were not always the most dependent. In conclusion he promised that he "would never cease to exert his voice in urging the absolute necessity of obtaining universal suffrage" and other measures such as the Secret Ballot and shorter parliaments.

In July 1835, Thomas Smith, a Tyneside manufacturer, reported to Sir Matthew White Ridley, one of Newcastle's M.P.s, a conversation that he had had with the radical leader, William Meikle. In Meikle's view, corporation reform, though it might deprive the burgesses of their privileges, was to be welcomed as "another stage to a republican form of government which
was the general wish of the lower orders, for that a King and
aristocracy were much against the true interests of the country".
Smith added:

"He said that I would be astonished if I knew the senti-
ments of many in Newcastle above the lower orders on
this subject, upon which I named some who take a leading
part at their meetings, and amongst them Mr. John Fife,
who he said had declared to him that he was in favour
of a republic". (40)

At two setpiece occasions, where meals were organized to honour the
visits of national radical leaders, Fife acted as chairman in one
instance, and as one of the chief hosts in the other. On 14 Sep-
tember 1835 Daniel O'Connell came to Newcastle, as part of a tour of
large towns including Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds, Edinburgh and
Glasgow, in order to promote his ideas as to the necessity of recon-
stituting the House of Lords. Fife chaired a meeting which agreed
upon an address of congratulation to the radical Irishman before his
arrival, was part of a deputation which greeted him at Gateshead,
and again took the chair when O'Connell made a speech in St. Nicholas'
Square. O'Connell claimed that if 50 men were chosen at random from
the Mechanics' Institutes and then 10 drawn from these, they would
possess more good sense, real knowledge and ability between them
than the whole body of the House of Lords. In the evening, Fife pre-
sided at a dinner attended by 339 men in the Music Hall, Blackett
Street, and proposed the key toast to the health of O'Connell. On
28 November 1836 Feargus O'Connor, the future Chartist leader, visited
Newcastle at the invitation of the Radical Reformers' Association,
also as part of a tour through the North of England and Scotland. In
a speech, O'Connor made a clever allusion to the major architectural
alterations that Samuel Grainger was undertaking in the centre of
Newcastle.

"He had been told that he was a leveller, a revolu-
tionist and a destructive. So they were in Newcastle.
They were pulling down the antiquated nuisances of their
forefathers, and erecting splendid mansions in their
stead; and in like manner he was a destructive of the
injurious domination of Whig and Tory tyranny".

He was met with a deputation including Fife, Laing and Doubleday, and
entertained at a public breakfast of about 50 people. One annalist
later wrote of O'Connell's visit,

"those who considered themselves the respectable classes
of society, even in the middle ranks, kept aloof from
his banquets and exhortations",

but Fife in the mid 1830's did not keep aloof from the radical cause.
From the early years of the decade, Fife recognised the importance of the press in disseminating reform principles. He was the chief financial backer, and a major contributor from the end of 1830, to the Northern John Bull, a monthly magazine which had obtained some notoriety for its lampoons of local dignitaries, although plans to turn it into a weekly newspaper foundered. Subsequently Fife played a part in the establishment and maintenance of two short-lived radical newspapers the Newcastle Press (13 July 1833 - 4 October) and the Newcastle Standard (26 November 1836 - 15 April 1837). Fife directed a letter in the first issue of the Newcastle Press 'to the productive classes of the people on the Tyne and Wear':

"A few individuals devoted to the great cause of the improvement of the condition of the working classes, offer to you in this Northern district, a Press, conducted by men who have penetration to see, knowledge to understand, and courage to denounce those abuses, which now ground you to the dust". (43)

The contents of the Newcastle Press and the Newcastle Standard are important, since they give accounts of industrial disputes and radical meetings in the North-East which are often not available elsewhere. A publisher of a radical pamphlet in September 1836, wrote in a preface;

"Not one of the four journals of the Whigs and Tories give publicity to the public proceedings of Radicals, except on particular occasions, when it suits their pecuniary interests, or the designs of their party". (45)

But Fife's association with the Newcastle Press ended in bitter recriminations and a very public argument with Charles Larkin, the chief contributor. Fife, after some hesitation, had agreed to act as one of the two bondsmen for the paper, which meant that he provided security for the payment of advertisement duties, due to be paid every six weeks, and that he was liable to guarantee a maximum amount of £1,000 levied on his goods, if the effects of others did not amount to the sum which might be deducted from the paper in the form of fines for libels against the King or his government. It had been very difficult to find people prepared to act as bondsmen and Fife only undertook the responsibility after being secured from financial loss by four verbal guarantees. The extent to which Fife's position was merely nominal, and his degree of responsibility for, and control over, the contents of the paper, proved to be a major source of contention. The disagreement became open in April 1834 when Fife publicly disclaimed all connection with the contents of the paper, but it was a long-standing dispute. There had been an opaque editorial
comment in October 1833 that "attempts have been made to establish a sort of petty dictatorship over the Press" and speeches by Fife at popular assemblies, such as when he chaired a meeting of the working classes in Newcastle for the purpose of petitioning for a repeal of the 'Taxes on Knowledge' in December 1833, were not given the coverage that might have been expected. Forced by Larkin into making distinct charges against the management of the paper, Fife pointed to Larkin's descent into criticism of personalities, such as a brutal allusion to Donna Maria, the young Queen of Portugal, the defence of Spanish and Portuguese 'Aposticals' (Larkin was a zealous advocate of Roman Catholic interests), and a backwardness in advocating universal suffrage, annual parliaments, and the ballot. Larkin for his part vigorously defended his articles and characterized Fife as "grossly ignorant" and possessed of a "filthy imagination". Following the failure of the Newcastle Press, Larkin, Doubleday and Robert Blakey often spoke of re-establishing a weekly radical newspaper in Newcastle, and at one point consulted William Cobbett for advice, who agreed to release the general manager of his own newspaper to assist with the project, but the idea subsequently fell through. The Newcastle Standard was never established on a sound financial basis. It had been hoped to find 40 shareholders but in the event less than 20 were obtained. These proprietors were friends and admirers of Charles Larkin:

"The proprietors had in view chiefly his interest - they united for the purpose of retrieving his fallen popularity, relieving his distress, increasing his wealth, and raising him to a state of influence and prosperity in the world".

The enterprise failed, however, through Larkin's high-handed and domineering management of the paper, but it is notable that in April 1837 it was John Fife, together with Doubleday, who bailed him out financially by agreeing to guarantee his debts and costs, indicating both that the split between Fife and Larkin in 1834 was not final and the importance which Fife attributed to maintaining a radical newspaper voice on Tyneside. A letter which Fife addressed to 'the Radical Reformers of Newcastle and the Neighbourhood' in the Newcastle Standard of 31 December 1836 contains the fullest and most concise description of his political stance. He referred to the difficulties of the existing position both in the House of Commons and in the country and the divisions which existed among radicals. All had the same end in view but differed as to the best means of securing a real representation of the people in parliament. As he did
consistently through most of the 1830's, Fife called for a pragmatic, realistic approach. There were no hopes of converting the existing Whig ministry into radicals, but if radicals withdrew their support in Parliament, the Ministry would fall to pieces and a Tory administration would grant no concessions to the radical agenda. Radicals should take their stand on 'Durham principles' (see below pp.257-258) - there was no point in adopting an all or nothing approach. Radicals should take what they could get - "We cannot attain the summit of our wishes at one leap, but shall we not therefore attempt it step by step". If, for example, they concentrated on the Ballot question and that was gained, radicals would immediately become many degrees stronger in the House of Commons and would be in a better position to attempt further progress. It was a classic exposition of the tactics of gradualism:

"No Radical Reformer need be ashamed to fight his battle upon this ground, for what compromise does he make? Does he relinquish his hopes of universal suffrage and annual parliaments? Certainly not - he only consents to receive for the present an instalment of a debt, the justice of which is disputed".

Fife carried this same spirit of compromise into Newcastle's electoral politics in the mid 1830's. There were a series of difficult decisions to be taken respecting the selection of liberal and radical candidates, and the voting tactics which should be adopted, and Fife was a central figure in the invariably disputatious deliberations. At the General Election of January 1835 Fife chaired the election committee of James Aytoun, a radical Edinburgh attorney, and exchanged public letters with 'A Ten Pounder' over Aytoun's merits as a prospective M.P. The anonymous correspondent noted of Fife, "You have, for some time, been looked up to as one of the leaders of the extreme party". But Aytoun only decided to stand as a candidate shortly before the contest, and there had been earlier electoral maneuvering by Whigs and Radicals. The town's sitting M.P.s were Sir Matthew White Ridley and John Hodgson, but the political principles of both men were ambiguous. Ridley, the Whig representative for the town since 1812 had become increasingly conservative in his political opinions and was not prepared to discount giving his support to an administration led by the Duke of Wellington. Hodgson, was supported by Newcastle's tory interests, but to back his claim of political independence could point to his votes in favour of the Reform Bill and his support for triennial parliaments. Amongst Hodgson's freemen supporters there were a large
number of radicals who adhered to him as much out of dislike for Ridley as a liking for Hodgson himself.  

At a meeting early in December 1834, electors considered the means best calculated to secure the return to parliament of two candidates pledged to household suffrage, triennial parliaments and voting by ballot, and two weeks later it was confidently asserted that one such candidate had been secured. A 'Meeting of the Friends of Mr. Ord' provided a demonstration that Fife enjoyed the confidence of both Whigs and Radicals; whilst Larkin was received with ridicule and disapprobation and was eventually shouted down, Fife came forward amidst loud cheers and proposed the main motion calling upon William Ord to stand. 330 'leading people' signed an invitation to Ord and following his acceptance formed themselves into his election committee - for Ord there was "no withstanding a good chance at such an interesting moment". He was not in the vanguard of the movement for parliamentary reform to the extent that many of his supporters had perhaps expected, observing to Lord Holland:

"They take me without pledges and protesting against further extension of the Reform Bill and objecting to ballot - and allowed me in my speech to tell them they had been both unreasonable and ungrateful to the late ministry".

Nevertheless, as far as his supporters were concerned, he represented a considerable improvement on the sitting Members of Parliament - as Ord noticed:

"The want of a declaration against Peel and the Duke from either of the old members (Ridley and Hodgson) produced the application to me". (53)

It is interesting to note that, whilst Fife was still uncertain as to the plans and intentions of Aytoun, he wrote to Ridley conditionally promising him his second vote:

"...for your sake I wish he [Aytoun] may come, as Mr. Hodgson will suffer most by him. I found this opinion upon information I had this morning from one of Mr. Hodgson's most powerful supporters, and it only amounts to a confirmation of that which I have always entertained. If I can prevent it, none of those who confide in me shall split upon Mr. Hodgson and should no candidate present himself going further towards the extreme left, I promise you a vote... Your address of the 15 December admits of considerable latitude of construction and all the Radical party who do not swear by Cobbett are most jealous of the Wellington administration". (54)

Had this letter become public knowledge, it would have badly damaged Fife's reliability amongst Newcastle radicals. Once all four candidates were in the field, men on the liberal side of politics had some
difficult decisions to make as to how they would use their two votes, and calculations often depended upon which candidate an individual most disliked. Some of the tactical considerations are brought out in a letter from William Brockett, the Gateshead solicitor, to John Fife, after he had been canvassed to vote for Aytoun. He was undecided as to how he would vote, except that he would definitely support Ord. Of Aytoun he wrote, "could my vote secure his return he should have it" - he liked his election address and Aytoun's political sentiments coincided with his own, whilst he described Ridley as "nothing short of a political apostate". The key question for Brockett, was "can Mr. Aytoun be secured and Sir Matthew ousted without injury to the cause of Mr. Ord?"\(^5^5\) Other liberals were prepared to remain loyal to Ridley - for example, T.E. Headlam, although unprepared to canvass on his behalf or propose him as an M.P., as in previous elections, nevertheless still gave Ridley one of his votes - as Doubleday dryly put it, "An old Whig will not quarrel with a man of twenty thousand a year for a trifle".\(^5^6\) The final poll of candidates: Ord 1,844, Ridley 1,500, Hodgson 1,257, Aytoun 988 (with Fife splitting his votes between Aytoun and Ord) was a major disappointment for radicals. The immediate lesson that Thomas Doubleday drew from the election, in A letter to the Radical Reformers of Newcastle-Upon-Tyne on the late election and its attendant circumstances was that "nothing is to be hoped for from that party we denominate Whig". Ord had received 800 split votes from the radicals, yet there had been only a handful of votes for Aytoun in return:

"As soon as I heard that our candidate was to come in, if at all, by the votes of Mr. Ord's friends, I said - and my friend Mr. Fife will remember - 'then he will not come in at all'... our faith was once more pinned with a radical skewer upon the superfine, sleek and well-napped sleeve of the party who were now to gull us for the fiftieth time".

Doubleday did not include all whigs in his charge of duplicity - some were as much dupes and naive victims as the Radicals:

"Many of that party [the Whigs] I am proud to call my friends but it unfortunately happens that without intending it they are the great cause of most of the mischiefs their party has perpetrated. Themselves liberal and well-intentioned, they become every now and then a sort of involuntary decoy-duck for a set of people who have no such liberal notions..."\(^5^7\)

It is unclear to what extent, in Doubleday's eyes, Fife fell into this category. Certainly it was a feature of Fife's thinking in the mid
1830's that, although he considered the course of legislation was far from perfect, he was prepared to give whig ministers, and local whig leaders, the benefit of the doubt, and to work with them. This was in keeping with the spirit of the Lichfield House Compact of February 1835 - a loose Westminster alliance - which had committed the bulk of radical M.P.s to a policy of co-operation with the whigs and Irish M.P.s led by O'Connell. The compact was based upon the assumption that the Tories must be defeated and the opposition organized for this purpose. Thus, for example, in Newcastle in June 1835 a joint meeting of Whigs and Radicals, at which Fife was as usual prominent, agreed to form a Newcastle Reform Association and a subscription was entered into for the purpose of registering and defending the claims of all independent voters and defending Tory attempts to register fictitious and illegal voters.\(^58\)

The death of Sir Matthew White Ridley in July 1836 meant a by-election, and Fife was Vice-Chairman at a meeting of Whigs and Radicals to choose a candidate that they could jointly support. At first, at the instigation of the wily electoral operator Joseph Parkes, and E.J.Stanley, probably mediated through Headlam, it was agreed to invite Edward Ellice (Jun.), son of the whigs' chief whip Edward Ellice, M.P. for Coventry (Parkes observed to Lord Durham, "As your nephew and Lady Grey's he will we think go down well with Whigs and Radicals"), but he declined, pleading his prior commitment to his constituency, a circumstance the thwarted Parkes described as "very annoying". The choice of candidate thus lay between James Aytoun and Captain Christopher Blackett, who was from a prosperous Northumberland family which had provided Newcastle with Members of Parliament in the eighteenth century. Fife argued in favour of the former - he had been chairman at a dinner to honour Aytoun in February 1836, attended by 165 men, when the Scotsman had pledged to come forward in the event of a future vacancy. After considerable discussion and disagreement, however, the meeting decided narrowly in favour of Blackett to contest the vacancy with Hodgson (now Hodgson Hinde).\(^59\) Although Fife was prepared to campaign on Blackett's behalf, he did everything he could to infuse the candidate's moderate opinions with a dose of radicalism, claiming, for example, (with no evidence) that Blackett would vote for the ballot if he was returned to parliament. It was largely through Fife's influence that men like Blakey, Laing and Meikle were reluctantly persuaded to vote for Blackett. Fife went so far, at one point, in attempting to defend Blackett from the charge of
supporting the Duke of Wellington's administration in 1829, that the candidate disowned his advocate. In a close fought election, Blackett was narrowly defeated by Hodgson-Hinde, 1,576 votes to 1,528. The result was interpreted in several national newspapers as showing the country's opposition to the whig proposals for reform of the Irish Corporations and the Irish Church, and similarly Daniel O'Connell concluded that the by-election represented the sentiments of the people of England, and thus the people were opposed to the claims of Ireland. Supporters of Sir Robert Peel hailed the result as a "signal triumph", in a constituency where an overwhelmingly whig corporation had recently supplanted the tory corporation following the Municipal Reform Act and "the means at their disposal are large - second only to the Corporate Funds of Liverpool". In fact, as Fife put it, the result reflected "local circumstances peculiar to the borough". The most important local consideration was the loyalty felt by the freemen towards Hodgson-Hinde, and the fact that they wished to exact revenge for having their privileges, as they saw it, diminished by the Municipal Reform Bill (949 freemen voted for Hodgson-Hinde compared to 468 for his opponent). Other important considerations were Blackett's opposition to the ballot, and the illegitimate influence and treating brought to bear by Hodgson-Hinde. In a speech after the poll had closed, Fife pointed to the latter factor, in particular, arguing that Hodgson "had done more than any other man to perfect the political degradation of the borough". At a radical meeting he described the electorate thus:

"The constituency of this town is of a very mixed character. One third may be called Reformers - another third is made up of Whigs, and a set of trimming waverers and vacillating shabbies - the remaining third consisting of wealthy fools and the richer order of tradesmen, this latter class being the most ignorant and besotted of the three, and as destitute of political principle, as of political information".

They bartered their principles for a large order to their manufactory, or a customer to their shop. Soon after this election, there was a joint meeting of Whigs and Radicals, which again agreed to form a Newcastle Reform Association to watch over the registration and otherwise secure the Liberal interest, which shows that the attempt of the previous year to establish a similar association had come to nothing. But the whig attendance on this second occasion was half-hearted (Headlam, Philipson and Bigge did not attend) and soon dropped off. A meeting of the Reform Association in October 1836, which was in part
devoted to a post-mortem on the by-election defeat, but which also discussed future candidates in the radical cause, represented a
definitive parting of the ways between Whigs and Radicals, and Fife was still on the Radical side of the divide. Doubleday and A.H. Beaumont argued that the election had been lost because the candidate was insufficiently radical, but Fife replied in "a long and energetic speech":

"I myself, as a radical, felt as much dissatisfaction as any radical reformer could do under the circumstances but what were we to do at the eleventh hour... it was your duty, when you could not do the very best, to do the next best, as prudent and honest reformers".  

(64)
The meeting decided that Sir William Molesworth, philosophic radical and M.P. for East Cornwall, would be a suitable future candidate, but in the next few months Newcastle radicals were to be repeatedly frustrated and disappointed in their search for a candidate. Molesworth was only one of a number of names that was bandied about - another was H.G. Ward who had irreparably upset his freemen constituents in St.Albans by his support for municipal reform. These two men, of not dissimilar political views, were both in the position of looking for a constituency, having alienated their supporters elsewhere, and, in a letter to Molesworth, of 23 November 1836, Ward recognized a comic element in the situation:

"You are by far the greatest boroughmonger or borough monopoliser in existence. Go where you will, North, South, East or West, one is sure to fall in with you. I had a very snug settlement in Westminster, but Sir Wm.Molesworth has ousted me! I was talked of with some favour at Newcastle, but Sir Wm. Molesworth has got a requisition in his pocket from all my quondam well-wishers! I might seek refuge at Leeds, but Sir Wm. Molesworth's name again stares me in the face! Now I want much to know where you fix yourself, and more peculiarly what you intend to do about Newcastle, where I think I might have a very fair chance of establishing myself comfortably. Of course, however, I do not dream of this until I have clearly ascertained your decision etc. etc...".

Molesworth eventually declined the offer to stand in Newcastle and accepted an invitation from Leeds. 65 The name of Colonel Torrens, a political economist was mentioned, at one point, as another possibility at Newcastle but in January 1837 the Reform Association agreed to support Ward, and carried a unanimous resolution that a letter be written by Fife, tendering an invitation to Ward to stand in Newcastle. 66 Ward provisionally accepted the offer, :
"provided you can satisfy me, that the two great sections of Liberals is sufficient to afford a reasonable prospect of their being able to return two members, and that the Radicals and Whigs, merging all local difficulties, as they have done already at Leeds, are prepared cordially to co-operate".

This was a tough caveat, and Ward seems to have been much less convinced that Newcastle represented a comfortable refuge than he had been a few months earlier. Whilst Newcastle Whigs and Radicals were formulating a reply, Ward received an invitation from Edward Bramley, Secretary to the Sheffield Reform Association to stand as a candidate there. John Parker, M.P. for Sheffield, had informed Bramley of Ward's virtues and added:

"There is an idea that he is going to Newcastle, but I am quite sure that he will not if a good prospect appears elsewhere".

In his reply to Bramley, having established what the current position was, Ward confirmed his lukewarm feelings about the invitation from Newcastle:

"...nothing can be more uncertain than the result of the negotiation. Indeed I am warned by so many friends not to expose myself to a doubtful contest, or to contend against the mass of corruption which I shall find amongst the freemen of Newcastle, that I have more than once been on the point of giving up the idea of going there altogether..."

Ward, who could claim a North-East connection, having married the second daughter of Sir John Swinburne in 1824, subsequently accepted the Sheffield offer and turned down Newcastle. The tory Newcastle Journal commented gleefully that "the luckless Whig-Radicals of Newcastle meanwhile are forced to go again a-begging" and even speculated that Fife might be put up as a candidate. Early in March 1837 there was a further meeting of the Reform Association, which produced another split between Attwood and Fife. Attwood warned an acrimonious meeting not to be led astray "by trimming go-betweens who wanted to yoke the Radical-cart to the wheels of Whiggery", said that given the choice between Hodgson-Hinde and a radical in favour of the New Poor Law he would vote for the former, and proposed the candidature of Colonel Napier, the historian of the Peninsular War. Fife reproached the Radicals for a lack of energy, and exclaimed, "If the Radicals do not exert themselves, how the devil can we expect the Whigs to do our work". He was in favour of returning to Aytoun.

It was Fife's amendment that was carried, but nothing seems to have come of this second application to Aytoun. Until shortly before
the General Election of July 1837; it seemed as if the sitting members for Newcastle would not be disturbed, but there was a late challenge from Captain Coulson, Charles Bigge and A.H. Beaumont. Ord and Hodgson, however, retained their seats. Fife was away from the town during the election and did not vote.

Fife had to put up with regular accusations of backsliding, during the 1830's but retained a consistent commitment to the cause of constitutional change. Nevertheless the differences with more radical colleagues over the means that were to be employed to secure the desired end, became increasingly difficult to smooth over as the decade progressed. When the public split with Larkin took place over the contents of the Newcastle Press there were shouts from some individuals at the meeting of 'Turn Coat', 'Whig', 'Fudge' and 'Why did you not stay out of the Union when you were out'. When Fife was prepared to advocate the cause of Blackett in July 1836, again there were those who execrated him as a political traitor and the Newcastle Journal misrepresented the position thus; "the friends of Mr Aytoun were defeated by the influence of Mr. John Fife, their once popular idol". 'A Late Councillor', in a pamphlet which provided biographical sketches of all the councillors in the reformed town council, accused Fife in November 1836 of trimming and changing on many questions since he had entered the council - he was "not the man of the people to the same degree he used to be", "formerly a Radical, but joined the clique, and was metamorphosed into an alderman". Commenting upon this sketch the Newcastle Journal added, "Mr. Fife, between the Whig and Radical stools has got a fall. We predict that he will sink still lower". But Fife succeeded in riding these criticisms and some of his activities in upholding the radical cause have been outlined above. He also showed his commitment to the cause of reform in other ways - for example, early in 1835 he published A Letter to Lord Viscount Howick in vindication of the constitutional principles of household suffrage, triennial parliaments and voting by ballot. This was a courteous and respectfully phrased reply to a speech Howick had made at Alnwick in January 1835 to the electors of the Northern Division of Northumberland when he had stated that he was not prepared to support any further alterations in the constitution of the House of Commons. Fife expressed gratitude for the extension of the franchise in 1832 but added,

"It is very easy to prove that the number of intelligent and independent men excluded from the
elective franchise is greater than the number of those enjoying it"

and that

"a large proportion of the electors have private interests to promote by the abuse of the privilege, and only use it conscientiously when duty goes hand in hand with private interest..."  (74)

Fife's elevation to the ranks of Alderman made him the subject of gentle ribbing at the radical dinner in honour of Aytoun in February 1836 but he was not regarded as having sold out the radical cause. Doubleday was critical of the House of Lords amendments to the Municipal Reform Bill, but argued that it was a good bill -

"in proof that it was a good bill, there was his good friend Mr. Alderman Fife, sitting in that chair (great cheering)".

Fife was the subject of a fulsome eulogy from Aytoun at this dinner, and one of the banners which decorated the room read 'Fife and the Reformers of Newcastle'. And Fife continued to support radical resolutions at public meetings - for example in June 1836, he voted in favour of an amendment proposed by Robert Blakey, 'That in consequence of Sir Matthew White Ridley's continued opposition to the Whig Ministry, his opposition to Municipal Reform in Ireland and lack of support for the Irish Church Bill, he was unworthy of the support of the electors of Newcastle'. It may have been the description of Fife by 'A Late Councillor' which prompted Laing to move a vote of confidence in Fife on the occasion of Feargus O'Connor's visit in late November 1836. Early in 1837, in what was very much a personal initiative, Fife conducted a series of separate campaigns and meetings for the Ballot and extension of the franchise, with the wider aim of supporting the efforts of Joseph Hume in parliament. He started the campaign for the Ballot in the Town Council and a requisition calling for a meeting on the subject was signed by 350 people. After the meeting early in February, a petition to the House of Commons lay for signature at the offices of the Newcastle Chronicle, Tyne Mercury and Newcastle Standard. A second requisition calling for a public meeting in the Guildhall to discuss the extension of the suffrage was signed by 558 men. At the meeting in March, Fife asserted the right of the people to an immediate extension of the franchise on educational grounds, but by petitioning for universal suffrage he argued they would run up against obstinate and immediate resistance in parliament. He illustrated his usual argument with a local analogy:
"If they saw a man who was desirous of getting to the top of St. Nicholas' steeple, attempting to reach it by jumping from the pavement, they would think either that he was not sincere in his wish to get there, or that he was not very wise; but if he went step by step, up the long tedious spiral staircase... he would gain his purpose". (79)

The campaigns did not rally an enormous amount of support - not only Whigs like Emerson Charnley, R.P. Philipson and Headlam remained aloof, but leading radicals such as Ayre, Blakey and Laing also took no part in the proceedings. Nevertheless it was an indication of Fife's personal authority, as well as showing the problems of maintaining the political stance that he did, that he was able to mount such a campaign at all. In November 1837 there was further evidence that Fife had not lost sympathy with the causes of working men. He donated a pound to the subscription for the Glasgow Cotton Spinners, and when A.H. Beaumont the proprietor of the Northern Liberator, delivered a collection of £40 to Glasgow he noted that the subscription was not alone from working men, and that several friends of the cause from the middle classes had contributed. He singled out Fife in particular:

"Mr. Fife has been heretofore distinguished as a bold advocate of Radicalism; and now that the Whigs have exposed in open day their treacherous nature, we hope to see him again leading the democratic ranks". (80)

It is from the end of 1837 that historians of Chartism on Tyneside begin to pick up the story of political radicalism in the North-East, and it is not the intention of this chapter to once more go over ground that has been covered many times already. Fife's role, however, in the events of the late 1830's, down to and including the 'Battle of the Forth' in August 1839 has been the subject of more than one misconception. D.J. Rowe, for example, noted:

"That the revival of political radicalism in the north-east did not come only at a working class level is suggested by the fact that on 4 December 1837 John Fife, the mayor of Newcastle, who had been a prominent reformer in 1831-2, chaired a meeting in Newcastle... called to express regret at Lord John Russell's 'finality' speech". (82)

Regrettably, this sentence includes two errors of fact and one error of interpretation. Headlam rather than Fife was chairman of the meeting, and Fife did not become Mayor of Newcastle until November 1838. More importantly, rather than denoting a revival of Fife's political radicalism, the meeting more accurately represented its swansong. Two years later, at the Michaelmas Guild of Burgesses,
Fife himself pinpointed the end of 1837 as the time when he decided "I could no longer, as an honest man, go forward with the most democratic party". Fife’s speech at the meeting in December 1837 in no way renounced his radical credentials - he called for the resignation of Lord John Russell, to vehement cheers, cries of bravo, and sustained applause, described himself as "a republican under compact", and expressed disappointment at the absence of many of the town's middle classes:

"He expected to find a meeting worthy of such a town as this, instead of which, he found a meeting at which the working classes predominated in such numbers as to throw a reflection on the middle classes".

Finally, he seconded a resolution moved by Attwood calling for reactivation of the Northern Political Union which was to be founded upon the basis of the Newcastle Working Men's Association. Yet the Newcastle Journal headlined its report of the meeting "Grand 'Split' between the Durhamites and The Democrats" and argued that Fife was making a different statement with his actions than his works:

"Mr. Alderman Fife, formerly the idol of the mob, and ready to go in advance of the most dangerous principles, passed his quondam friends, the Democratic leaders as contemptuously as if their touch was contagious, and took his station with Aldermanic dignity, on the bench to the right of the mayor". (85)

In his speech Fife deprecated the violent language and some of the policies which his radical friends advocated. He would probably not have dissented greatly with the account of the meeting given to Lord Howick by Headlam:

"Nothing can be more mischievous than the attempt which the leaders of the ultra-party, particularly Mr. Double-day and Mr. Beaumont are making, to delude and excite the working classes by drawing a line of demarcation between them and everyone who has property or capital, by violent tirades against the Poor Law Bill and by endeavouring to rouse their feelings to the use of physical force". (86)

Fife thus stepped back from the frontline of politics after December 1837, as his political hopes were being frustrated on all sides. He had concluded his speech:

"those who thought with him should carefully consider whether they ought to waste their strength in endeavouring to get what was beyond their grasp, or take what they could get quietly". (87)

The constant antagonisms and bickering which seem to have been an ever present ingredient of radical politics must have been personally wearing, and it was hardly surprising that he began to ask
himself whether he might not be more productively employed doing something else. It was rare that emotions broke through Fife's calm detachment, at least in a public context, but at the meeting to select a radical candidate in March 1837, when the differences with Attwood emerged, the mask had temporarily slipped. He was reported as replying to an accusation of irritation:

"What had personal feelings to do with political principles? If he had allowed himself to be controlled by such a motive, he would not have been there that night but otherwise might be amusing himself in society with matters more agreeable to his taste", (88)

while the Newcastle Journal put the following words into Fife's mouth:

"No man has suffered more in the cause of the people than myself, and you would do me a service if you were to drive me for ever from the political arena, and send me back to my profession... You would then give me an opportunity of repairing those gaps which sixteen years of Tory persecution have made in my future". (89)

Later in 1837, Fife was elected surgeon of the Newcastle Infirmary, which represented an important advance in his professional career. Outflanked on the left, after holding the line so effectively in the mid 1830's, Russell's speech had scotched hopes of even piecemeal reforms being conceded by the Whig government, and even the banner of Lord Durham, under which so many radicals had optimistically sheltered between 1834 and 1838, was now flying at half-mast.

Following speeches by Lord Durham at dinners in Glasgow and Newcastle in November and December 1834, in which he advocated triennial parliaments, vote by ballot and household suffrage, support for the 'Durham principles' remained a vital link between Whigs and radicals. He was looked to as a possible leader and saviour of the future. Durham's ideas were enthusiastically picked up and extolled by men like John Fife and Thomas Doubleday. Fife wrote early in 1835:

"The principles promulgated by the Earl of Durham are adopted by nineteen twentieths of the unrepresented by a great majority of the electors, and, in short, they are anticipated as a consolation to the people, for the disappointment they have experienced in the working of the reform bill..."

And Doubleday, who had previously spoken sceptically of the Earl of Durham to public support, had changed his mind about him:

"... who is to be the minister, who is to stand between the country and Revolution? Who is there to be found who has at once sense to understand the difficulties of the country, and courage to grapple with them?... I am very much deceived indeed if the Earl of Durham be not
the man to make those great changes for which we are
struggling". (91)

Support for or opposition to 'Durham Principles' drew a clear line
of demarcation between liberal and conservative whigs, so that C.W.
Bigge, Ridley, Sir John Swinburne, George Silvertop, T.W.Beaumont
and Lord Howick did not attend the dinner in Durham's honour held in
Newcastle in December 1834, largely on account of their opposition to
the sentiments he had expressed at Glasgow. Lord Durham himself
was pleased with the effect created by the Newcastle dinner where he
reported to Parkes that the best and most determined feeling pre-
vailed. Of his speech he wrote:

"You will see that I have 'put the steam on' in this
part of the world. The machinery is in good order, and
we can go 15 knots an hour against a Duke [of Wellington]
wind",

and Charles Wood, M.P. for Halifax wrote to him subsequently, "All the
world speaks in the highest terms of your Newcastle speech which is
printed off as a pamphlet". William Ord, who chaired the Newcastle
dinner, but who was only a lukewarm advocate of the ballot, was con-
sidered to have gained popularity in his election campaign of January
1835 by his connection with the Durham cause, and Hedworth Lambton,
the first Earl's brother, campaigned on his behalf. Lord Durham main-
tained a running commentary on the relative strength of the candidates
in North-East constituencies, including Newcastle, in a series of
letters to Parkes. In some constituencies, such as North Durham,
where his brother was a candidate, and Durham City, Lord Durham had
a personal financial stake, but it is clear that at Newcastle he had
no direct influence - he was merely a well-informed and interested
observer. He wrote on 17 December 1834, for example:

"We are doing well at Newcastle - old Ord is sure of
Newcastle - either Hodgson or Ridley will go - I fear not
both... Aytoun the Edinburgh Radical is come to Newcastle
but has no chance - he will only divide the Liberal interest -
but with all this we shall have Ord at the head of the poll".

In his view, a well known public man such as Edward Ellice (senior)
should have been started with Ord, and the liberals could have
carried both seats. Five days later he commented -

"You have no idea of the intensity of feeling here.
Two days ago Ord had received 2,000 promises out of
3,000 electors - Sir M.Ridley and Hodgson not 500! ".

Subsequent letters revised his view of Aytoun's chances which he
described as 'improving every day' and 'looking up'. Whilst Durham's
letters convey a sense of immediacy, he was in fact relating events
second hand as a result of information received from men like William
Ord (junior) who wrote to him on 27 December:

"My father is quite safe - Aytoun is gaining strength every day - and the other two decidedly losing - there is no saying what will be the result. Many of us have already contributed to giving the Scotchman a lift - and will do as much as we can without going to an extent which would injure him as well as us. This must not be mentioned to any one".

Ord believed that Aytoun would go to the poll with as many promises as Ridley and Hodgson and that much would depend on the degree of financial cupidity of about 300-400 freemen - "the loose fish will go into the nets which are best baited". But whilst Durham's direct influence on Newcastle elections was not marked, his indirect influence may have affected the voting intentions of some men. For John Fife in the mid 1830's, reference to Lord Durham was an invariable touchstone. It was "singular to find in one belonging to that order [the aristocracy] an individual entertaining feelings entirely favourable to the people"; he had seen that there was a point where liberal whigs and "the most politic of the Radicals" could fairly meet, and had raised a standard under which they might rally. The true extent of Lord Durham's reforming intentions retained an air of ambiguity, which he was to sustain by his absence abroad, first as an emissary to Russia, and then as governor of Canada. His 'Bowlby Letter' of 8 July 1837, and subsequent speech to the North Durham Reform Association in October 1837 were vague enough to bear a variety of interpretations, but on the latter occasion be deprecated 'violent radicals', and many contemporaries became less convinced of Durham's radicalism. Fife, however, retained a belief in Durham's abilities and sincerity. At a dinner he attended as Mayor in February 1839, of the Master and Brethren of the Trinity House in Newcastle, a highly conservative body, Fife announced that he had a toast to propose:

"He begged leave to assure the company that he was aware how improper it would be in him to introduce any political subject knowing as he well did that in so large a company there must be a difference of opinion. He would therefore divest the toast which he should have the honour to propose of all political feeling which he would prove by only noticing the tact and ability which the Earl of Durham had displayed in his embassies to Russia and Canada and for which he was entitled to the gratitude of the country".

A disgruntled observer noted that only four out of sixty people applauded, no one attempted a cheer, and shortly afterwards twelve of the company walked out in disgust. There were still those who considered that Durham might return in triumph like a 'Deus ex machina'.
figure, and transform the political situation. The fact is, however, that disliked by Lord Melbourne, and lacking support among other leading Whigs, subject to illnesses which restricted his political involvement for weeks at a time, and marginalized by his absence abroad, Lord Durham became much less of a force in domestic politics from the end of 1837.96

Whilst Fife himself pointed to the end of 1837 as a turning point in his political thinking, it was not a change that was immediately obvious to contemporaries. He continued to receive favourable coverage in the Northern Liberator and to be a target for the heavy sarcasm of the Newcastle Journal. In April 1838, he made a popular speech at an Anti-slavery meeting in Brunswick Chapel which adopted a petition for immediate and unqualified emancipation of negroes.97 During the preparations for a public demonstration in favour of the National Petition, to be held on 28 June 1838, Queen Victoria's Coronation Day, Fife wrote a letter to the organizing committee maintaining his commitment to universal suffrage, at the same time as pointing out his differences from the majority of his brother radicals as to the means of obtaining the change:

"this is an unpopular opinion but I will not conceal it, and purchase favour by false coin".

He did not attend the meeting, but did make a subscription towards the cost of organizing the demonstration which was addressed by Feargus O'Connor and attended by an estimated 60,000-80,000 people, the largest gathering since the reform agitation.98 In August 1838, at a time when the Whigs were boasting of the acquisition to their party of Fife, the Northern Liberator revealed that he had signed the national petition in favour of the 'People's Charter'.99 A few weeks later, when the council of the Northern Political Union was reactivated, there was a very close division as to whether Fife should be nominated as a council member. Robert Blakey and Laing spoke in his favour and it was only decided by a narrow vote to defer the decision in order to ascertain whether he would act with them.100 The same council, in November 1838, were to choose the ultra-radical Julian Harney and Dr. John Taylor as delegates to the Chartist 'National Convention'. The Newcastle Journal was horrified at the prospect of having such 'an unscrupulous partisan' foisted upon the town as Mayor, referring to 'his insolent inordinate ambition' and being convinced of the "manifest indecency and impropriety of such a course".101 Six months into Fife's mayoralty, he continued to receive unfavourable coverage from the newspaper:
"it should be remembered that Mr. Fife has now achieved political greatness - that he has gained the summit of his ambition - that he is installed as Mayor of Newcastle - that he is no longer a Radical honest, but a Radical philosophic - he has therefore kicked down the ladder by which he rose". (102)

Conversely, even after his elevation to the mayoralty in November 1838, the Northern Liberator did not write him off as a bad job. When Fife broke with precedent and called a public meeting to censure Whig ministers in the evening, so that operatives might attend, his actions were described as "highly independent, manly, and praiseworthy":

"his conduct has won him a place in the regards of the people from which neither malice nor calumny will be able to drive him". (103)

It was only a few months before the events of July and August 1839 that Fife the man of the people became transformed into Fife the "sham-Radical Mayor". Whilst Fife was certainly disenchanted with the tactics and language adopted by former radical colleagues by the summer of 1839, it is a considerable misrepresentation of the existing state of affairs at that time to claim that "he led the 'respectable' opposition to Chartism in Newcastle". 105

Fife had to strike a balance in the way that he reacted towards Chartist meetings, and the potential that was clearly being created for a breakdown of law and order. Historians are generally agreed that he got the balance about right, W.H. Maehl commenting, for example, that:

"If the authorities had been less firm, or on the other hand, if their actions had caused serious injuries and/or deaths, events might have gone out of control then or shortly after". (106)

From the outset of his mayoralty, Fife vowed to keep his period of office free from partisanship and admitted that this meant he would have to keep his own opinions under wraps. 107 There were those on the right of politics, however, who doubted the ability of the Newcastle Corporation under Fife to deal effectively with a putative Chartist insurrection. General Napier noted in his diary that the Newcastle corporation was generally regarded as harbouring Chartist principles, and Archibald Reed, voicing his fears in a letter to the Duke of Northumberland, the Lord Lieutenant of Northumberland and the city and county of Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, made a similar observation. He was worried about disaffected men gaining possession of the bayonets and other weapons of a disbanded yeomanry corps which were kept in the castle:

"I cannot name the subject to the Mayor or Whig Magistrates, as there is no dependence upon them, indeed it would have
been a more appropriate name had I said Chartists, for such are the greatest numbers of the corporation". (108)

The Duke of Northumberland, refrained from making so pointed an observation, but passed on many of the fears expressed by Reed to Lord John Russell at the Home Office:

"if extensive combinations of armed masses are allowed to exist under the excitement and guidance of designing leaders it must lead to rioting - the harassing of the few troops in the district - the destruction of property and probably to great loss of life". (109)

But whilst contemporary fears of the Newcastle authorities secretly supporting the Chartists were largely unfounded, the charge that they were unduly complacent about radical political activities has been supported by historians. Thus Maehl argues that the magistrates had taken few precautions to deal with disorderly and unlawful action before the tense weeks from June to August 1839 and had remained passive whilst the Chartists grew steadily in strength and increasingly reckless in their language. In his view, a riotous incident arising out of a late-night street brawl on 20 July, jolted the magistrates out of their complacency. In fact, watchful sensitivity better characterizes the attitude and actions of the authorities before and after 20 July rather than complacency. After voicing his criticism of the Whig corporation in February 1839, Reed called upon the mayor a few days later, to find that he knew about the problem of bayonets, rifles and swords and had ordered them to be put in safe-keeping inside the goal. Fife told Reed that he was only too aware that people had "armed themselves to a considerable extent" and that "the military were prepared to act at a moment's notice":

"He added that he had men amongst the disaffected people and trusted that he would be able to ascertain their intentions previous to any movement". (111)

Fife refused permission for an intended Chartist meeting on Whit Monday in May 1839 in either the Forth, the Spital, the Parade Ground, or the suburbs of the town, so as to protect Newcastle's property owners and ratepayers from any disturbances which might ensue. He did however, tell the Chartist delegation which came to him, that he would not interfere if the meeting was legally conducted and held upon the Town Moor. The reasons he gave for his decision to refuse a meeting within the town were:

"the deluded and exasperated state of a portion of the working classes, occasioned by the misrepresentations of their own press, and the incendiary language of some of their leaders, and on the other hand, my own responsibility for the peace of the town." (112)
Fife particularly stressed the "systematic falsehood and delusion" practised upon the people by the press in a letter to the Duke of Northumberland.\textsuperscript{113} When the Chartists began to hold daily evening gatherings in Newcastle, the language used by Chartist leaders was carefully monitored for any direct breach of the peace and the Home Office was kept regularly informed of developments. Precautions had been taken so as to be ready to react at short notice to any disorderly conduct or infringement of the law - the police force was kept in a state of constant vigilance, there was regular liaison with the local military garrison and the magistrates of Gateshead and County Durham had been contacted, so as to co-ordinate forces should the need arise. Rather than being complacent, the authorities took a conscious policy decision:

"We have deemed it adviseable to refrain from any active interference with these numerous assemblies from the conviction that by so doing we lessen the danger to be apprehended from excitement and irritation". \textsuperscript{114}

The unsympathetic Newcastle Journal considered that Fife was to some extent reaping the political consequences of the seeds of political agitation he had helped to sow in 1831-32, but it noted in May 1839 that he had expressed a private determination to act effectively and with vigour to repress any attempts at popular disturbances.\textsuperscript{115} At a Chartist meeting in the Forth on Monday 15 July the authorities were complimented on their forbearance.\textsuperscript{116} When order did finally break down after a crowd refused to disperse on 30 July, the authorities did not act in an insensitive, tyrannical way. Even Chartist leaders such as Thomas Devyr, Secretary of the revived N.P.U. and a journalist on the Northern Liberator admitted that the police and troops dispersed the crowd coolly and sensibly.\textsuperscript{117} Julian Harney later described the 'Battle of the Forth' as Newcastle's 'Peterloo', but with no serious injuries occurring, the clash between the authorities and the Chartists deserved neither epithet.\textsuperscript{118}

The unpopularity which Fife brought upon himself by his actions as mayor, compounded by his subsequent Knighthood, was demonstrated when he failed to obtain a hearing at a public meeting called to petition parliament to enquire into the causes of the country's commercial embarrassment, and the condition of the Foreign Office, in May 1840. He was assailed with shouts of "Where's the Specials?", "Read the Riot Act!", "Traitor Fife!", "Shabby", "Turncoat", and "Remember the Spital!". When he asked for a fair hearing there were shouts of "Was there fair play at the Forth?", "His hands are stained
with the blood of the Chartists!"; and "Who stabbed the men that carried the flag-staff?", but he continued for many years to take an active part in the public life of Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, being elected Mayor again in 1843. Whilst it is not the intention of this chapter to continue a detailed account of Fife's political career beyond the 1830's, there must be some doubt about Welford's dismissive conclusion that "he gradually settled down into a mild and colourless Whig". For example, he was present at a meeting in September 1842, attended by Chartists, which amicably elected James Sinclair, secretary of the local branch of the National Charter Association as Newcastle's delegate to the National Complete Suffrage Conference, and he continued to exert important influence at local elections. Whilst undoubtedly more conservative in his later life, and unprepared to support the particular policies of the Northern Reform Union for parliamentary reform, he continued to advocate schemes of his own:

"To arrest the rolling stone on its precipice of Democracy we must go in front of it and there construct a resting place"

The former advocate of universal suffrage anticipated "evil results from the investment of the least educated with the greatest power", but hoped to establish a Life Assurance and Benefit Society to make fundholders of the elite of working men, then to enfranchise them that they might act as an effective restraining power over the less worthy - "there are no men so willing and so able to keep in order the less sober and less intelligent of the working men as their own natural leaders". An anonymous biographical sketch of Fife in 1855 noted that "the sympathies of Sir John are essentially popular", and such sympathies were not often shared by mild and colourless Whigs.

Hostile sources charge Fife with having too great a sense of his own importance, and it would be fair to say that he revelled in the opportunities of playing to a public gallery. He liked to "cut a conspicuous figure", and kept an expensive home establishment. A contemporary diarist in 1839 argued that it had been vanity which had led him to become a leader of the N.P.U. in 1831-32. G.C. Atkinson considered that as Mayor, at the time when a Chartist uprising was threatening, Fife was prone to exaggerate, fuss, and to act with "childish and unnecessary éclat". He doubted not his determination, but his motivation:

"If they come to violence within the town, the Mayor will (I think) proceed to great extremity with them - perhaps from a feeling of policy - but I suspect as
much to vindicate his reputation; he is a vain, weak-minded man but lacks no firmness. He said to me one night, 'I should like, Mr. Atkinson, to see Newcastle streets painted with blood'. This is not the right feeling of a chief magistrate'.

When the Chartist threat seemed to be diminishing, Atkinson wrote of Fife, "I dare say he is beginning to despair lest the whole thing subsides uneventfully." Having received his Knighthood on 1 July 1840, the Newcastle Journal reported that he returned home by steamship with "all his baggage being conspicuously labelled 'Sir John Fife, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne' " which title was "ludicrously and obsequiously mouthed by the very small coterie of dependents and political admirers by whom he is surrounded". But if Fife was rarely backward in coming forward, and enjoyed being the focus of attention, this does not seem to have affected his public standing in the mid 1830's. Before the elections to the first Reformed Town Council in December 1835, a requisition from the ratepayers of St.Nicholas Ward, calling upon Fife to stand received 100 names within 24 hours of its commencement, and Fife's 165 votes in the subsequent election, which put him at the head of the poll, meant that with the exception of only 37 electors, everyone who polled in the parish gave Fife a vote. Moreover, Fife's name was regularly at the head of petitions when public questions were agitated; in February 1836, for example, he headed 298 requisitionists calling for a public meeting to petition for a repeat of the Newspaper Tax.

The years between the reform crisis and the rise of Chartist political activity clearly saw a diminution in mass radical agitation, but as far as historians are concerned they are also to some extent missing years. The revival of Tyneside radicalism is usually placed in late 1837 with the arrival of A.H.Beaumont and the establishment of the Northern Liberator, but there was a significant constituency and organization to build upon, in which John Fife had been the single most prominent individual. Thomas Doubleday wrote in January 1836:

"I now firmly believe that dividing the electors into three portions, Tory, Whig and Radical, the last is numerically stronger than either of the two others." (126)

Whilst it is possible to dismiss this as a partisan and exaggerated calculation, it can be pointed out that nearly one-third of the constituency of Newcastle-Upon-Tyne voted for James Aytoun in January 1835, despite the fact that he was a stranger, began to canvass only shortly before the election, and that his opponents were assisted by the whole united influence of the indirect bribery and patronage.
A standard view of the politics of the 1830's is that "Middle-class people, once given the vote, wanted to conserve institutions which they had formerly been inclined to attack" and that such people saw a great deal to attract them in Sir Robert Peel's brand of Tamworth Conservatism. The career of John Fife shows that one needs to bring generalization down to the level of detailed individual example. What at first sight seems a dramatic instance of a poacher turned gamekeeper becomes less clear-cut when subjected to close inspection. Fife held responsibilities in 1839 with which he was not encumbered in 1831-32, but his basic stance as regards the representation of the people and the tactics that should be adopted to secure the desired end, had not substantially altered.
FOOTNOTES:


2. P. Cadogan, Early Radical Newcastle (Consett, 1975) pp.17, 82, 96-97, 121.

3. Northern Liberator 3 Aug. 1839; cf. a Northern Political Union poster complaining of 'illegal documents' by the magistrates and the hypocrisy of the Mayor of Newcastle [Tyne and Wear Record Office (T.W.R.O.), Blandford House, Newcastle 1074/1221].


8. Morning Chronicle 26 April 1832.


16. A Full Report of the Evidence and Discussions During the Official Investigation into the affairs of the Municipal Corporation of Newcastle-Upon-Tyne... (Newcastle, 1834), eg. pp. 22, 34. Fife was critical of the expenditure of £1,000 for a dinner given in honour of the Duke of Wellington in 1827, noted the lack of attention of some of the aldermen to corporation affairs and enquired of the Town Clerk with regard to making of freemen and the serving of apprenticeships, if there were not many cases where members of certain companies made apprentices free without any servitude, and treated the indenture as a matter of form.


19. Cf. D. Saunders, 'Tyneside and the making of the Russian Revolution' Northern History Vol. XXI (1985), pp. 259-263; Welford had a vivid recollection of an impassioned, sarcastic speech made by Attwood, at the height of the war against Russia, which was received with uproarious applause. (Men of Mark I, p. 154).


21. Cf. C. Larkin, Address to Joseph Sturge Esq. at a Public Meeting in Newcastle 26 Sept. 1842... (Newcastle 1842).

22. Londonderry Papers, (Durham County Record Office) D./LO./C461(ii) Liddell to Londonderry 8 July 1838, (I am indebted to Miss P. Radice for this reference).


25. J.S. Jeans, Pioneers of the Cleveland Iron Trade (Middlesbrough, 1875) pp. 42-43. The author interviewed Attwood in his old age and although details are unreliable, this is an interesting early example of oral history.


29. Proceedings of a Public Meeting held on the Town Moor... on 27 May 1833 to petition parliament for vote by ballot, universal suffrage and annual parliaments... [pr. E. MacKenzie, Newcastle, 1833] p. 5. The estimate of 10,000 people was likely to have been generous.


32. J. Collingwood Bruce, Old Newcastle: Lectures (Newcastle,1904), p.96, (Delivered in 1876).


38. There had been an earlier meeting on the Town Moor on 14 April 1834 to express sympathy with the Dorchester Labourers and which called for the dismissal of ministers, in consequence of their inhumanity, attended by an estimated 40,000 people (Newcastle Press 19 April 1834).


41. North Country Lore and Legend II (June 1888) pp.254-255 'Feargus O'Connor in Newcastle'; (September 1888) pp.390-392 'Daniel O'Connell in Newcastle'; T.W.R.O. 1074/115 - Annual Register (1835)'History' pp.367-71 gives a hostile account of O'Connell's tour. Lord John Russell was obviously unimpressed with radical political activities in the North of England and Scotland at this time, writing of O'Connell, "I am glad he is stirring North Britons and not the West Britons as I would rather see a firebrand thrown on a pile of granite than on a barrel of gunpowder" (Holland MSS B.L. Add MSS 51677 Russell to Lord Holland 18 Sept. 1835).


44. e.g. Newcastle Press 3 Aug. 1833 'Shipwright's Union'; 31 Aug. 1833 'A Sail Cloth weavers' strike at Jarrow'; 15 Feb. 1834. 'Public Meeting of the Pitmen'; 19 April 1834 'Mason's strike at Hartlepool'; Newcastle Standard 3 Dec. 1836 'Meeting in support of Staffordshire Potters. Unfortunately neither paper is available to researchers in North-East libraries.'

45. Joseph Harris (Publisher) Report of an address delivered by Mr. John Bell, Editor of the 'London Mercury' in the Music Hall, Blackett St.... 6 September 1836, also, the speech of John Fife Esq.... (Newcastle 1836), p.3.

47. Ibid., 3 Jan. 1834.
48. Ibid., 1 Feb. 1834.
50. 'One of the Proprietors', A Letter to the Reformers of Newcastle-Upon-Tyne in answer to the statements of Charles Larkin relative to the Newcastle Standard (Newcastle, 1837); Newcastle Journal 8 April 1837.
61. Peel MSS B. L. Add MSS 40318 f. 46 Sir James Graham to Peel 30 July 1836; Newcastle Chronicle 30 July 1836; Anon. [W. A. Mitchell], Tunbelly Again: Letter to Thomas Doubleday Esq. (Newcastle, 1836).
62. Newcastle Chronicle 30 July 1836; Cf. W. L. Harle, Letter to the Freemen of Newcastle-Upon-Tyne... (2nd. ed. 1844) for detail of support for Hodgson among freemen; Grey MSS Fife to 3rd Earl Grey 18 Nov. 1860, "Mr. Chris. Blackett about 20 years since was thought by Mr. Ord to have lost his election here by his opposition to the ballot".


67. *Newcastle Journal* 28 Jan. 1837; *Chapters in the Political History of Sheffield 1832-1849* (Sheffield, 1884) pp.17-18. Ward had made his political name by moving a resolution for Irish Church Reform which had resulted in Stanley and Graham seceding from the Whig party to Peel. [Cf. Speech by H. G. Ward Esq. M. P. on moving certain resolutions respecting the Irish Church in the House of Commons on Tues. May 27, 1834 (London, 1834)]. In January 1835 he had been one of 70-80 Philosophic radicals exploring ways of establishing an independent party. Parkes described him as a potential "trump card... He is a convert of late years but is sincere - a gentleman and man of the world. He avowed at St. Albans the 'Durhamite Creed' in so many words." (Lambton MSS D.P.14 No.4. Cat.No.317, Parkes to Lord Durham 26 Jan. 1835).

68. *Newcastle Journal* 4 March 1837.


70. The final voting figures for this election were: Ord 1,852, Hodgson-Hinde 1,817, Bigge 1,189, Coulson 1,129, Beaumont 359. Cf. Lockey Harle MSS (T. W. R. O.) 429/21 W. Ord to W. L. Harle 11 July 1837: "I cannot but fear that with respect to Newcastle a kind and considerate feeling towards my present circumstances has had some influence in discouraging a contest which might have placed a representative of more liberal opinions in Mr. Hinde's seat and this is no small aggravation(?) of many feelings which oppress me."


73. Anon., *The Corporation Annual; Or Recollections (Not Random) of the First Reformed Town Council...* (Newcastle, 1836), ('A Late Councillor') pp.17-18; *Newcastle Journal* 26 Nov. 1836.


86. Grey MSS (Dept. of Palaeography and Diplomatic, University of Durham) T.E.Headlam to Lork Howick 5 Dec. 1837.


88. Ibid., 11 March 1837.

89. Newcastle Journal 11 March 1837.


92. Grey MSS C.W.Bigge to 2nd Earl Grey 7 Nov. 1834.


95. Syon MSS (Alnwick Castle, Northumberland) Archibald Reed to the Duke of Northumberland 20 Feb. 1839.

97. Northern Liberator 21 April 1838.

98. Ibid., 9 June, 30 June, 15 Sept. 1838.

99. Ibid., 4 Aug. 1838.

100. Ibid., 15 Sept. 1838.


102. Ibid., 13 April 1839.

103. Northern Liberator 13 April 1839.

104. Ibid., 25 May 1839.


110. W.H. Maehl, Chartist Disturbances p.389; Dynamics of Violence p.112.

111. Syon MSS Archibald Reed to the Duke of Northumberland 24 Feb. 1839.


113. Syon MSS John Fife to the Duke of Northumberland 3 April 1839.


120. Welford, Men of Mark p.234.

121. Gateshead Observer 3 Sept. 1842; Fife nominated candidates in Elections in 1851, 1852 and 1858; Cf. Lockey Harle MSS 429/19 R. Hartley Kennedy to W.L. Harle 17 June 1855 for evidence of the importance a prospective candidate assigned to Fife's support.
122. Grey MSS Fife to 3rd Earl Grey 9 May 1859.


126. Proceedings of Dinner to Aytoun, p.3.


128. For an account of the tensions between 'middle class' radicals and chartists at Birmingham during this period cf. C.Behagg, "An Alliance with the Middle Class : The Birmingham Political Union and early Chartism" in J.Epstein and D.Thompson (eds.), The Chartist Experience (1986) p.59-86.
"Surely, in the present age, in a contest for the confirmation and extension of the rights of the middle classes... it is highly improbable that the party which advocates the greater extension of those rights should not, in an appeal to those very classes, prevail over that which confessedly contends for a narrower limitation of them?"


The nature and development of political parties in the nineteenth century has spawned a lengthy and enduring historical debate. The 1830's have benefitted from the detailed investigations of historians such as Gash, Beales, Aydelotte, Close, Brent, Cameron, and Newbould, in this respect.¹ This chapter is concerned with the development of party organization beyond Westminster. Personalities and special interests frequently over-rode considerations of national party politics; referring to the county and borough constituencies that he knew of in 1837, around the Fens and East Midlands, Sir Robert Heron declared that "the interest taken at an election is all personal and local, in a very slight degree patriotic".² Professor Vincent in his book The Formation of the Liberal Party urged historians to look at what was happening in the country as opposed to being over-concerned with events at Westminster and to view politics "from the base upwards". For him, and more recently Cox, the crucial period of party formation was from 1857-1868, but one can see in the constituencies in the 1830's "the origins of Liberal politics".³ Several other historians have begun to explore in sample localities and regions the process of how candidates were chosen, by whom, and where power in the constituencies lay, and produced valuable work. But if Professor Gash's observation holds true that, "only on an established basis of local history can national history... be written", there is still a great deal more research to be done on individual constituencies before an acceptable overview can be attained.⁴ Following a discussion of whig attitudes towards party organization in the 1830's, this account, based primarily, in the first instance, upon the private correspondence of Joseph Parkes, Edward Ellice, and Lord Durham, will set out their aims, successes and problems in stimulating local efforts from London, and then outline the activities and fortunes of the Bristol Liberal Association.
in the 1830's as a case-study in constituency organization.

The 1832 Reform Act both stimulated and accelerated the development of party organization in the constituencies (although, as has been demonstrated, vigorous party activity could be detected in electoral politics before 1832 in many constituencies). In neither county nor borough was registration an automatic system: a would-be voter was obliged to claim his rights and pursue this claim in court when challenged. Initial responsibility for preparing the register was placed upon Overseers of the Poor in each parish, for they alone knew who was qualified by payment of their rates, and occupation of the necessary house or buildings. This left plenty of scope for chicanery and political manipulation. At Bristol it was alleged in 1838 that nearly all the overseers were Tory party agents. Thus, in the context of the 1830's, provincial party organization primarily meant getting one's supporters onto the electoral register and being alert to the machinations of the opposition. Party feeling was sustained by the unusual frequency of General Elections - six between 1830 and 1841, and in the boroughs the excitement of municipal reform in 1835 and local elections. Arguably, increasing activity by constituency associations also involved holding certain shared aspirations and assumptions about the relationship that should exist between rank and file opinion and the actions of politicians in parliament. As it turned out, the liberal rank and file in the late 1830's rejected the official whig party as an expression of their political feelings, both nationally and in Bristol.

Whig/Liberal policy required fresh context and a change of emphasis after 1832, and, to a certain extent, it got this in terms of legislative achievement. 'Decade of Reform' is one of the labels which historians have attached to the 1830's. To rank and file Liberals by the end of the 1830's, however, it was the shortcomings of whig reforms which were more obvious than their achievements. The whigs saw reform of Parliament in 1832, and subsequent reforms in the Church, Local Government, the Poor Law, Ireland, the economy, and Empire as a means of constraining the radicalism of the middle classes. The whig aristocracy did not succeed in resolving the problem of their relationship with radical groups who saw the 1832 legislation as a first instalment of reform. It was a problem which, for the most part, they were loth to consider. A comparison of the fundamentally different outlooks of the liberal activist, Joseph Parkes, and the whig leader after 1834, Lord Melbourne, is instructive.
Parkes made constant and enthusiastic references in his letters to the "steam", by which he meant the pressure of public opinion as expressed through petitions, public meetings, and the press. It was his view that the public mind in this country will right everything. Referring to his hopes for Municipal Reform Parkes could comment:

"When the Bill is public the meetings will go off like minute guns... Nothing but agitation - agitation - agitation will on this question keep the cabinet up to the mark". (7)

Melbourne, on the other hand, was reluctant to allow a democratic function to public opinion and referred with regret to:

"How much the power of the liberals has always depended on excitement and what is called agitation - such force is like that of a fever or epilepsy, almost irresistible at the moment but... succeeded by tiredness. With returning spirits, prosperity, law, property, would resume its natural influence". (8)

The whig aristocracy was prepared to listen to 'respectable' public opinion, expressed and articulated through the proper channels but not to be dictated to by it. They were certainly reluctant to use their large financial resources to sponsor extra-parliamentary organization. This sprang from a fear of populism, an instinctive belief in the respectability of parliamentary preoccupations, and a belief in the freedom of parliament to act independently. Such a position was intellectually consistent with what is widely accepted as the whigs conservative and concessionary motives for passing the 1832 Reform Act - a desire to keep decisions in the hands of "those who were most fit to govern the affairs of the country". When Lord John Russell made the whig position explicit, however, in his 'Finality' speeches of November 1837, which were seen as closing the door on further constitutional reforms, many Liberal activists were stunned, and Russell's vague, if sincere, commitment to 'reform', seemed no more than a meaningless cliché. His Letter to the Electors of Stroud, in May 1839, on the principles of the Reform Act, similarly fostered the view of a cabinet unreceptive to wider influences.

More than one historian has seen whiggism as losing its way in the 1830's and argued that its historic and traditional philosophy was becoming increasingly irrelevant. Inadequate leadership is often pointed to, and, put at its worst, the whigs clung rather aimlessly to office after 1835, thanks at first to Irish.radical
support, and later the patronage of the Queen, lacking in principles, objectives, and a coherent philosophy.\textsuperscript{11} This view has been successfully revised in recent years by Newbould and Brent. The former argues that the whigs persevered in trying circumstances and did have a political strategy of sorts, based, primarily, on a desire to keep radical opinion at bay. He stresses an unspoken alliance between Whigs and Conservatives over a range of legislation, which temporarily served the needs of both. Brent sees whiggism as re-casting itself in the 1830's, dispensing with many of its secular Foxite characteristics, and emerging with a distinctive new political identity based upon the Liberal Anglicanism of younger whigs such as Russell, Howick, Morpeth, Hobhouse and Poulett Thompson. This entailed a more aggressive, imperial Foreign Policy, a belief in the tenets of Political Economy and Free Trade, a social concern for popular education and the conditions of the working classes, and a sympathy with non-conformist religion together with, a willingness to legislate in its favour - "Whiggery had not yet become a fossilized exclusively aristocratic and landed connection."\textsuperscript{12} Neither Newbould or Brent, however, are concerned with the constituency, rank and file view of events. The subtlety of parliamentary tactics (which were in any case concerned with excluding radical influence at Westminster) and the new religious motor of Liberal Anglicanism among younger whig leaders were not immediately apparent in the country. There was no electoral pay-off. After 1838 the differences between frontbench whigs, and backbench Liberals and radicals became wider, and a similar gulf developed between parliamentary and constituency preoccupations. At the same time, a process of social atomisation had occurred in many parts of the country by the end of the 1830's; advocates of the People's Charter, and leaders of the working classes regarded the liberal middle classes as seeking power for selfish ends.

* * * * *

Lord Durham recognized the need, in general terms, in November 1834 for "the formation and organization of associations in every town and village of the Empire" and his experience during the campaign before the General Election of January 1835 strongly reinforced this opinion. He wrote to Joseph Parkes,

"Truly the result of this election must convince every Reformer of the necessity of having an association or
club in London, to counteract the machinations of the Tory Carlton Club... Is there any chance of effecting it?.. I would come up to town directly and devote my whole time to effecting it." (13)

An early dissolution of parliament was possible and there was a need for a central committee where Reform candidates could apply for assistance and advice (Lord Durham himself had enquired unavailingly whether there were funds available to support Grainger in his contest for the City of Durham over and above the £500 he had personally contributed). He further believed that "a third of the actual strength is not on the Register owing to negligence and Whiggism". Durham liked to see himself as the founding father and mentor of the Registration Association which was formally established in London on 31 May 1835, but tended to offer distant strategic advice. In a practical sense he was most influential in organizing northern constituencies within his purview by establishing District registration committees with a general central committee. He felt a proprietary sense of personal responsibility for the North, writing from his embassy in Russia in March 1837, "I must be in England to look after our electioneering in the North." In November 1835, early in his stay in Russia, he had written solicitously to Parkes:

"Do not let the association get weakly or omit to superintend its education. It is, as you justly say, my child and I entertain towards it the feelings of a parent. If its organization is made as complete as I intended it, it would be the most powerful engine for defence, as well as offence, that any party ever possessed". (16)

Edward Ellice, a shrewd political insider and whig party manager had come to the same conclusion as Durham on the need for improved party organization. His own first-hand knowledge of the workings of the electoral system had been honed as Secretary to the Treasury, chief whip, and election co-ordinator between November 1830 and August 1832. The Times, in January 1838, by now a Conservative newspaper, described him as:

"a long-practised and inveterate Whig-Radical manoevrer famous beyond all men for splicing fractures, for patching up differences, for extricating ministries of his own forming from scrapes of their own creating". (17)

In an electoral system which was primarily local in nature rather than national it was what was actually happening on the ground which mattered, and the Whigs/Liberals had insufficient information on this basic question. The 1835 election had been fought, as usual, on an 'ad hoc' basis. In December 1834 Poulett Thompson could write to
Lord Howick that only Mulgrove, Duncannon and himself were left in London to do everything about the forthcoming elections. With the aid of Hobhouse these three prepared lists at 3 Cleveland Square (Ellice's house), assisted in the selection of candidates, and helped to distribute the whigs' limited financial resources. Ellice regarded himself as the originator of the Reform Association and later showed considerable pique that his thunder was being stolen by Durham and to a lesser extent Parkes:

"neither he, you [Parkes] or the people of whom you speak, had anything to do with or knew anything of the Reform Association till I called you into council for assistance in getting it up",

and in December 1835 he referred to Durham's "enormous bump of amour propre". Ellice was annoyed at the claim that "he was the cause of the R.A. through me. He was as much the author of it as Billy Holmes, and knew as much about it as his friend the autocrat". He was no instrument of Durham and argued that Parkes "by pampering his low appetite for vanities and adulation" rendered him "unfit for any plan of authority or credit". From April 1833 until December 1834 Ellice had served as Secretary of War with a seat in the cabinet, but after 1835 he never held formal office. He continued, however, to be an influential adviser to liberal governments behind the scenes right up to his death in 1863, and he managed the 1841 election for the whigs, including the distribution of party funds.

The hard-working Joseph Parkes was as fluent as Durham on the subject of his own influence, commenting in 1834 that "no 'commoner' has such local connections as I have, in the way of agitation. I know all the 'pull strings'... and claiming in July 1835 "a wider insight into and connection with the Liberal party of the country than any man living". Whilst these comments could not be viewed as understatements, Parkes had indeed built up important contacts with influential provincial liberal leaders through his work as a solicitor and election agent in and around Birmingham, Coventry, Warwick, and the Midland counties, and after 1833 as Secretary to the Commission on Municipal Corporations. His home in Westminster was much used as a meeting place for whig and radical M.P.s. He became enormously frustrated with the whig government during the course of the 1830's, and their unwillingness to show sympathy for the "requirements of the constituency created by the Reform acts". As regards the management of the press, which was another criterion of whig
organization and commitment to enlisting the support of opinion out-of-doors, Parkes regarded the government as "great fools... It has not been cultivated while the Tories have a regular artillery in the field." He made some effort himself in this respect requesting the proprietor of the Whig Morning Chronicle in October 1835 to moderate his newspaper's criticism of the whigs on the grounds that:

"The temperate class of Liberal of whom there are thousands in this country, some indifferent, some weak-minded, many wanting excuses, may be dog-barked into Peel's fold by our intemperate scribblers". (25)

But overall whig efforts in this respect remained haphazard and lacked commitment. Part of the problem was that Parkes was emphatically no whig himself, describing them to Francis Place in 1836 as:

"an unnatural party standing between the People and the Tory aristocracy chiefly for the pecuniary value of offices and vanity of power. Their hearse is ordered." (27)

Parkes, was, rather, an intermediary between whigs and radicals (he had made his name as an effective mediator between the government and the Birmingham Political Union in 1831/32) and this proved a barrier to the Registration Association receiving the full trust and co-operation of the whig leadership. Party organization was equated with radicalism, as Lord Melbourne spelled out in 1836:

"I have not taken much cognizance of what is going on at Cleveland Row, despairing of being able to manage or control. The fact is that these matters are in the hands of those who, from the commencement of the late administration, pursued the system which led to its downfall". (28)

Melbourne never made any equivalent appeal to Sir Robert Peel's famous 'Register, Register, Register' speech. As early as 1833, Parkes' frustration at whig inactivity led him to write that "I find no relief but in a violent fit of swearing when I am alone...". His tone was not markedly different by September 1841, when he concluded a letter to E.J. Stanley, the patronage secretary to the treasury from 1835-1841 and the whigs' chief whip, "unless some organization is made by the whigs, I will no longer waste my time working on their behalf." Parkes was equally prone, however, to excited exaggeration of the potential of political charges, and for a time, between 1835 and 1837 his hopes had risen markedly and the sense of disillusionment lifted. He had witnessed for himself in January 1835 during a contested election in North Warwickshire, which had been lost "by our own neglect of registration and pre-arrangement", some of the problems which existed on the ground. Of 1,037 individuals registered...
in the constituency since 1832, three quarters were Tory, whilst hundreds of whigs in towns were unregistered. Overall in the 1835 election many candidates were away from home at the time of the dissolution so that at least 20 seats had been lost through a lack of candidates, and Parkes later complained that "almost all the leading men were looking to themselves... In my whole life I never was or can be so disgusted". He thus responded eagerly to the challenge of setting in motion and organizing a central Registration organization. In its first months the Registration Association helped to stimulate a fair degree of success. Several dozen local associations were formed, the lines of communication between various whig/liberal organizations improved, and a similar association was established in Ireland in October 1835. James Coppock was appointed as a full-time secretary, with a salary of £300, and a residence in the society's rooms at Cleveland Row, which became a rendezvous of agents and solicitors from all parts of the country and a centre for party intelligence. When all the information and returns were collected, following the registration of 1835, Parkes reported to E.J. Stanley that the results were "highly favourable", commenting that:

"The Town constituencies have been thoroughly sifted by the Reformers, and especially a great weeding of the non-Resident Freemen who crowded many of the Registers of 1833 and 1834 for want of attention... But what strikes me most in the country and amounts to a distinct gain, is the organization and union of Reformers produced by this year's attention to the Register. All this result, besides additional numbers will, with Municipal Revolution, tell vastly at the next contest..."

The Edinburgh Review concurred, and complimented the associations "upon a large and decisive addition to the ranks of the Liberal voters throughout the three kingdoms". Parkes spelled out in great detail to Lord Durham, the gains he expected in the Liberal cause as a result of the battles in the Registration courts. In some counties there had been a 20-30% increase - North Warwickshire, South Lancashire, North Nottinghamshire, the West and East Ridings of Yorkshire, and South Staffordshire - and 16 other English counties were named where the whigs had "gained great strength". There were 6 "certain" gains in Scottish burghs and:

"in the English boroughs and cities our Liberal Registration Organization has been perfect and eminently successful... The increase of little buildings and houses has favoured us... Tories slipped in by the Town
Clerks have been knocked off the perch by our objectors".

He named Bristol as one of 14 towns where "we shall gain seats more or less by the Registration" and many close victories in the election of 1835 were regarded as having been secured.  

Parkes's optimism was fuelled by his expectation of the effects of municipal reform upon parliamentary constituencies. Many at Bristol, and in other corporate towns would have shared his view that, "Municipal Reform is the steam engine for the Mill built by 'Parliamentary Reform'. The one comparatively the shadow, the other the substance..." (35)

The sweeping Liberal victories of November 1835 exceeded even his expectations. He wrote jubilantly to Durham, in January 1836:

"Only think of Leicester, Liverpool, Coventry, Cambridge, York etc., etc., in our hands. Nothing surpasses the rout tell the Emperor of all the Russians but the conflagration of Moscow."

36 once Tory, now Liberal corporations, were represented in Parliament by one Tory M.P.; 17 once Tory, now Liberal Corporations were represented by two Tory M.P.s. Parkes thus anticipated picking up 70 seats, through the dent which had been inflicted upon Tory local patronage. Six months later he was a little more cautiously optimistic, forecasting that two-thirds of county seats were safe, the whigs would lose about 20, but gain 30-45 seats from municipal reform - "our great want is of opulent Landed Proprietors to find funds for Registration and contests." 36 Others shared Parkes' optimism, such as Thomas Creevey, who, writing to his step-daughter Elizabeth Ord shortly after the whig/liberal victories in January 1836, commented:

"There never was such a coup as the Municipal Reform Bill has turned out to be. It marshalls all the middle classes in all the towns of England in the ranks of Reform; aye and gives them monstrous power too. I consider it a much greater blow to Toryism than the Reform Bill itself." (37)

Parkes regarded the foundation of the Reform Club, which by March 1836 had the allegiance of nearly 250 M.P.s and about 1,000 members, as a further organizational coup. A number of radicals including Molesworth, Grote, Ward, Parkes himself, and later Ellice hoped that the foundation of the club would tie the whigs to radical policies and act as a kind of Trojan horse within the whig camp - Parkes described it as "the Whigs faced and in." 38 But it did not
in fact work like this and through 1836 the government refused radical
demands and they failed to alter government policy on, for example,
the ballot and triennial parliaments. It was indicative of the
fundamental division on the left of politics that by October 1835
none of the ministers had joined, and the more aristocratic and mod-
erate whigs continued to frequent Brooks Club. For a time, a number
of leading 'Philosophical Radicals' had tried to organize English
radicals as an independent third party, but as one of their own body
put it, "the want of organization and of energetic leaders renders
them weak as a political body". 39 In an influential article in the
*Westminster Review* in January 1837 which considered "what line of
conduct the Liberals ought to pursue with reference to the whigs"
and argued that radicals should be prepared to destroy the union,
Sir William Molesworth described the whigs as "but the remains of a
dying faction who are placed in power by the radicals" and added
that:

"in the larger boroughs, Whiggism hardly exists except
by name; most of those who call themselves whigs are in
favour of the ballot and of a reform in the House of
Lords". (40)

The 'passing of the whigs' in high office was in fact a long-drawn out
event, and their tenacious and continuing importance in politics
has been demonstrated as late as the 1880's. By 1837 radical
influence had already peaked and was diminishing, but there was some-
thing in what Molesworth said in terms of support for the whigs, as
such, in the localities. Spring Rice, in an important article upon
'The Present State and Conduct of Parties' in the *Edinburgh Review*
in 1840, in seeking to answer the charge that the "Government and their
supporters form an incongruous mass, united by no common or intelligent
principle", conceded that there were "inevitable and admitted dif-
ferences of political opinion in the Liberal party." 41

In October 1836 Parkes contrasted the whig/liberals unprepared-
ness in December 1834 with their readiness for any impending contest:

"Now, with decent forecast, we have most superior means
of planting the cause, the Reform Associations in town
and country, the Town councils, the Club; Many of us exten-
sively in communication with the leading liberals of the
country.". (42)

In fact, despite the accession of a sympathetic Victoria, which it
was thought would assist the government, the whig/liberals failed to
improve their position in the boroughs and were beaten heavily in the
counties. Parkes later estimated that the whigs had lost about 20 seats in corporate towns, mainly freemen boroughs - he had underestimated the extent to which they continued to be "auction marts of electoral corruption". Various reasons have been assigned for this defeat. The degree to which the government was involved in the affairs of Ireland and the church provoked opposition, whilst religious dissenters may have been lukewarm in their support for the whigs given that there had been a reluctance to legislate fundamentally in their favour. There may have been a Conservative reaction against the whig reliance on O'Connell and the radicals in the period 1835-1837, and a positive vote for improvement Conservatism. The Times reported over 50 conservative political dinners, for example, in the last quarter of 1836 at which the main topic of the speeches was the dangers of radicalism. But it was also the case that organizational efforts had been insufficient. Lord John Russell, for example, expressed himself unsurprised by the outcome of the English county elections, commenting to Lord Howick that "The thing is managed by the Tories spending much money and trouble on the registration." Yet Russell himself was relatively indifferent to party management, and took no pains to cultivate the goodwill of those on whom he depended for support! Sir Robert Heron, amongst other reasons, made a similar point:

"We have been routed more than could have been anticipated by either party. Church in danger, has done something, but bribery, the £50 voters, and our neglect of the registers have done more." (45)

What is certain is that after 1837 Liberals at party headquarters and in the provinces tended to be pessimistic as to future electoral prospects. There was disappointment that they had failed to stem the electoral tide towards the conservatives, and registration efforts slackened. This was particularly true in the counties - In August 1837 Parkes wrote despairingly, "What a slaughter has been made of the whigs in the counties! We shall have little more Liberal Registration there at present..." Six weeks later he noted that many of the county registers were "wholly neglected in despair." There is some evidence that in the counties it was more difficult to maintain supporters' motivation. The organizational structure of district committees reporting to a central committee broke down, for example, in the West Riding of Yorkshire and North Durham. Registration associations ran into problems over funds, gaining a sufficient number of
active and efficient district organizers (in other words geographically patchy commitment), and a lack of support and exertion from titled members of the party and the whig gentry. Walter Fawkes, for example, contrasted the disappointing position in the county with that of the great towns of Yorkshire which could be left to themselves—"they better understand the measures necessary for adoption, and can better calculate the balance of Registration." This slackening of registration efforts, of course, coincided with economic recession, growing unemployment, rising dislike of the effects of the New Poor Law, Chartist discontent, boredom with the government's preoccupation over Irish affairs, uncertainty about what the whig cabinet was going to do with regard to corn and other duties, and regular ministerial reshuffles. At the same time, conservatives effectively grasped the potentiality of registration politics in the three registrations of 1838-1840. It was indicative of the suspicion in which the Reform Association was held, that when an Election Fund Subscription was mooted following the 1837 defeat, many whigs objected "to the nucleus being the Reform Association and even to the meeting being dated there", and in order to distance the association from the subscription it was decided that Coppock's name should not appear among the originators. In 1839, when the association appears to have been wound up, Coppock was refused a minor government sinecure because his role at the association might have brought embarrassment upon the whigs. The Reform Association had for a time collated precious information, but it was neither equipped, nor designed to study each constituency in real depth. In any case information was of little use if not acted upon. Parkes gave his prediction to Russell in 1841 of the electoral position, but this was effectively an intelligent guess. The whigs entered the 1841 General Election once more upon a largely 'ad hoc' basis.

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Many of the themes outlined above were replicated on a local level at Bristol in the 1830's. In particular, the amount of energy devoted to the registration of new voters represented a good indication of the health of party organization and spirits. There was initial complacency on the part of reformers after 1832 which contrasted with an effective Tory response to the demands of a new electorate. Liberals enjoyed some success in the mid 1830's stimulated
by the shock of defeat in January 1835, but prospects faded away in the late 1830's amidst apathy, disagreement, and revived conservatism. In its annual reviews of the registration between 1838 and 1840, Fraser’s Magazine a tory periodical, could delineate a national picture of whig decline and relentless conservative advance, gleefully quoting from the whig Morning Advertiser in November 1838:

> the day is not far distant when the leaders, or those calling themselves so of the liberal party will bitterly rue their unaccountable remissness and criminal apathy."  

Other national features were apparent at Bristol, such as a lack of money and organizational commitment, and atomization and terminological confusion as to 'Old Whigs, 'modern whigs', 'Liberals', 'Reformers', 'Radicals' and sundry alternative labels. Overlying these general failures and national trends, however, were the individual characteristics and peculiarities of Bristol - the unpopularity of Bristol's corporation, the manipulation of charitable funds, the concerns of freemen, the structure of power within the town's key institutions, the position in the West Country of the Berkeley family, and other distinctly local factors.

There was a high degree of political antagonism and polarization in Bristol in the 1830's; the local press, the corporation before and after 1835, local societies, and charities, all showed a strong tendency to divide along party lines. The national complacency of the whigs as regards organization was mirrored at Bristol in the period of just over two years between the 1832 and 1835 General Elections. Reformers managed to get themselves into a terrible muddle at the 1832 General Election, which resulted in the election of the ultra-Tory, Sir Richard Vyvyan and the moderate 'Old Whig' J.E. Baillie. The two genuine reformers were rejected. Whig-Liberals at Bristol received an even greater shock at the General Election of 1835 which saw two Tories returned to Westminster - P.J. Miles and Vyvyan - and it was this defeat which stung them into renewed activity and organization. The Bristol Liberal Association was established in March 1835 and it worked tirelessly in the following three years, achieving a number of successes both on a municipal and parliamentary level. F.H.F. Berkeley, an advanced liberal, who advocated the ballot and repeal of the Corn Laws was elected at the General Election of July 1837. He retained his seat in 1841 but by then Liberal organization and morale had once more fallen into disarray. This account of the activities of Bristol reformers in the 1830's thus falls into
Organization became increasingly important at local level in the 1830's. It has been shown that the Bristol Tories had a formidable electioneering machine upon which they could call even in the 1810's and 1820's, but they also appreciated more quickly the opportunities presented by some of the detailed provisions of the 1832 Reform Act, and built upon their existing strengths. The area of the parliamentary borough of Bristol was extended in 1832 from 1.2 miles\(^2\) to 7.3 miles\(^2\) and the same boundaries were also adopted as municipal borders in 1835.\(^{54}\) Within these boundaries the parish continued to be the key unit from a political point of view. Bristol consisted of 18 parishes, each of which possessed generous charitable endowments which were managed by church-wardens, and a small Select Vestry, consisting of 10 or 12 people. Reformers gnashed their teeth over the continuing power of these vestries. They did not admit fellow parishioners to be present at their meetings, refused to allow the inspection of their account books, and made surcharges of rates upon some individuals in order to make up for defaulters who were in general Tory supporters, all those surcharged being religious Dissenters. The practical result of this lack of accountability was that the funds were applied, according to the Liberal W.P. Taunton writing desparingly to Lord Brougham:

"to promote the corrupt electioneering purposes of the Tory party; and every select vestry is a regular organized standing Tory committee for the purposes of parliamentary and municipal elections".

Another prominent Bristol Liberal, Harman Visger gave evidence to the Select Committee on Bribery in 1835 that he had seen the books himself in which electioneering proceedings were recorded in the Select Vestry minutes.\(^{55}\)

The strength of the Tory organization which reformers were up against, and their problems between 1832 and 1835 as perceived by sage political adversaries, can be assessed through the surviving private papers of Sir Richard Vyvyan. Vyvyan's agents maintained a well-informed watching brief on the activities of the Liberals. In the aftermath of the election of December 1832 the Reform Committee remained in existence and sought to mount a legal challenge to Vyvyan's victory, on the grounds of bribery and treating. It emerges that a lack of finance was a major hindrance; Bristol reformers lacked

three distinct sections: decline 1832-1835, revival and successes 1835-1838, and renewed slump 1838-1841.
wealthy supporters and they had already contributed a great deal to Protheroe's unsuccessful campaign. The committee required a sum of £2,000 to cover their legal costs but were not confident that this could be raised – promises of money were not enough, the contributions should be deposited with bankers. In fact the sum was raised by a public subscription in the parishes, after impassioned appeals in the local press, but it seems likely that this needed to be topped up by some of the wealthier supporters of reform. With the failure of the petition in April 1833, because of the perennial difficulty of proving agency before a committee of M.P.s, the Reform Committee quickly folded. It had hardly been a particularly effective organization since its establishment in April 1831; its membership of 'respectable' reformers – merchants, bankers, and businessmen, who saw themselves as a counterweight to the Bristol Political Union – had contented themselves with giving order and regularity to public meetings connected with reform, and T.J. Manchee had described them dismissively as "a body that can scarcely be said to exist". Nevertheless Whig-Liberals now lacked any kind of institutional umbrella beneath which they could settle, and effectively retired from the fray – Henry Bush reported that "the very heavy expense of the petition has completely disorganized the enemy for the present." Lack of money proved to be a continuing problem for reformers. For example, in the lead-up to the 1835 election campaign, Bush noted that the monied part of Protheroe's election committee had suffered from the collapse of the Brazilian Mining Company on the stock exchange and would not find it convenient to subscribe any large sum. And even in August 1836, by which time the Liberals were infinitely better organized, Bush could again note that they were very low in their funds and that the death and illness of two key subscribers had deprived them of £1,000.

Bristol Tories were quicker to realise the potential advantage to be gained from the new system of registration than their Whig-Liberal counterparts, as was generally the case nationally, and this was another area where their existing influence could be brought to bear. On the first two Sundays in August, lists of householders and freeholders were attached to church doors, whilst lists of freemen were placed in the Guildhall. The lists lay with churchwardens and the Town Clerk for claims and objections to be made before they were passed on to revising barristers who assessed disputed claims in court. There was much scope for tactical manipulation of this whole
process. Voters could be excluded from the lists on technicalities relating to their payment of taxes or poor-rates. Tax collectors could deliberately neglect to call until after the limit of payment for the purposes of registration had expired, they could neglect to charge ratepayers the necessary registration shilling or exclude the shilling sign deliberately from tax receipts. Alternatively, spurious objections could be made in the hope that individuals would not turn up at court to defend themselves (for which of course they would have had to leave their workplace). In 1833 Bush reported that in "the Radical parishes" nearly 400 people who had voted for Protheroe the previous year were not on the Register and that there had been no whig objections at the revision. In 1834 he again noted that the registration had been favourable to the Tories and added that a considerable number of small householders who had voted for Protheroe had omitted to register, whilst the conservatives remained in full force. Support was clearly drifting away from the whigs and here was a slight indication of apathy among progressively inclined but essentially apolitical individuals. Joseph Parkes, writing to Francis Place in January 1833 from Birmingham, had reported similar problems of motivation - "Our glass here is almost run out". During the reform agitation, petitions and meetings had maintained activity at a high peak, but "heavy personal and pecuniary sacrifices" at the election had taken their toll and it was unlikely that a public meeting on the Ballot and Septennial Act could be got up. Parkes ended with a heartfelt observation:

"But who is to go on with this public work and his private duty also? - it is impossible to keep up the devotion we have had here for the last two years". (62)

Whig-Liberals at Bristol thus lost out quite badly on the registrations of 1833 and 1834 and a member of the Select Committee on Bribery in 1835 asked Visger directly,

Q. "Is the Independent or Liberal Party not anxious enough for reform, for the object of securing a Member of their own, that they will make no exertions on the occasion of the annual registry?"

A. "There are a number of considerations as to that; they are rather inimicable as to curtailing the franchise for one thing; another thing is, that it is the most formidable undertaking that you could imagine, with a constituency like Bristol, where perhaps not more than one third are really to be found in the places for which they are registered." (63)

This was a weak answer since the first of his reasons was hardly
look to the registration - parochial committees and a general com-
mittee, all busy in watching the registry".  

The early 1830's can be seen as the period when the split between
'Old Whigs' and progressive reformers in Bristol, which has been shown
to exist from at least 1812, became explicit and irrevocable. The
rank and file activists at Bristol are henceforth more accurately
defined as Liberals rather than whigs although considerable termin-
ological inexactitude remained. Harman Visger commented in evidence
before the Select Committee in 1835 that a third party had emerged
at Bristol "as contradistinguished from whig and tory" although he
seemed to be unclear whether it should be referred to as the 'Liberal'
or the 'Reform' party. Elsewhere this third party was defined as
"the party of the people - the party composed of whigs in practice as
well as in principle". The Bristol Mercury in the heat of an elec-
tion battle, made a blunt threefold distinction between the Tory,
West-Indian, and Liberal parties. A series of six "Letters to Whigs
on Whiggery" published in the Mercury in December 1832 and January
1833 spelled out the differences in outlook between 'Old Whigs' and
'Liberal Whigs'. Arthur Palmer had defended his support for Baillie
on the grounds that he was a whig of 1688 "not a modern wild whig,
with an un-English tri-coloured flag before him" - he believed in
"rational and constitutional reform". The reply came that the tri-
colour was a badge of French freedom and an object of symbolic and
legitimate interest to any whig - the argument was essentially about
the right of people to amend the constitution when it had fallen into
disrepair. 'Modern whigs' were not wild - their policies were that
they opposed all monopolies and slavery, and were in favour of church
reform, relief for dissenters, improved education, shorter parlia-
ments, and extended suffrage and the ballot. The 'Old Whigs' of
Bristol had effectively coalesced with the Tories in order to support
their own self-interest in maintaining the West Indian monopoly and
West Indian Slavery. Over the next three years many of these 'Old
Whigs' either drifted out of politics or joined the Tory party - for
example, four of the Tory councillors in the first municipal corpora-
tion were former whigs. The absence of several prominent individuals
from the dinner given to Lord John Russell in Bristol in November
1835 allowed the Tory press to rubbish the meeting - "our leading
whigs gave no sanction to the proceedings". A Tory satirist had the
following vision:

"A voice whispered into my ear that Russell was surrounded
by the most wealthy and influential men of Bristol. I
looked around for such as I understood enjoy that reputation - for the Daniels, the Milites, the Acramans, Savages, Cunninghams, Bushes, Barnards, Paynes, Brights, Ameses, Baillies, Harfords, and inquired, 'Where are they?' " (69)

Several of the above were never whigs and could not have been expected to have attended such a dinner, but it is nevertheless fair to say that half a dozen of the wealthiest Bristol merchant families who had held whig sympathies, disassociated themselves from the Liberal revival of the mid 1830's. In the immediate post-reform years there was certainly a desire among 'respectable' citizens to distance themselves from radicalism. As the Bristol scientist William Conybeare confirmed in a letter to a fellow scientist in March 1833:

"In the last election my old whig party and the Conservatives coalesced against radical unions etc., which I firmly hold we ought to do generally".

As the Bristol Mercury aptly described it, some people withdrew from the political fray or drifted to the right, "from a certain indefinable dread that the progress of the movement was too rapid to be safe". It was as much a defensive gut reaction as a specific objection to the policies of the whig government, or even to the professed principles of Bristol Liberals.

Very soon after the 1835 election a decision was taken in Bristol that a permanent association was required to protect electors in the reform interest in the city, and that there was a need to draw up a set of objectives and rules. In March 1835 the Bristol Liberal Association came into being and published a set of objectives. The stress was on registration activities and note was taken of the advantage being gained by the Tory party exploiting loopholes in the system, and the reformers lack of organization. Great vigilance was necessary in large towns "especially in those encumbered with a corrupt body of servile freemen". Bristol reformers realised this for themselves without having to be nudged into action from above, although discussion of such a new approach would, of course, have been current in the London newspapers. The association established a permanent set of offices at Albion Chambers in the centre of the city, and was extremely active over the following three years. On more than one occasion it dealt directly with the government or agents of the government and, for example, helped to provide the information which Harman Visger used as ammunition before the Select Committee on Bribery. It was active in calling public meetings, and promoting
petitions, and its secretary J.B.Kington corresponded with London newspapers such as the Morning Chronicle and the London Globe. Leading members of the association capitalized upon opportunities to dominate both the Charity Trustees and the magistrates' bench-appointments that were the responsibility of central government. Several factors came together in the mid 1830's which contributed to the success of the Bristol Liberal Association. The most important factor was that its members had the dual motivation of seeking changes not only at the level of parliamentary representation but in the municipal government of Bristol, the abuses in which were notorious. John Ham, a former Vice-President of the Bristol General Union wrote to Francis Place that the corporation had "dulled the people into abject servility and the latter have but just awakened to their local slavery". There was probably also a shift in the consensus among Bristol rank and file Liberals to the left in their opinions. One indication of this was that they chose noted radicals such as J.T.Leader and James Roebuck to present petitions in parliament, or to argue their case, whilst they were represented by two tory M.P.s after 1835 (although Leader and Roebuck did represent West Country constituencies in Bridgewater and Bath respectively). Ham had further commented to Place that "the Manchees; and all the other 'trimmers' are however now progressing towards the Ballot and Radicalism" drived by events. Several themes are discussed in the following account of Bristol liberalism in the mid 1830's - the importance of a sympathetic press, the renewed exertions and improved organization with regard to registration and to electioneering in general, the dinner given to Lord John Russell in 1835, the impetus provided by municipal politics, changes, and disagreements, the association's involvement in the selection of Berkeley as a candidate, and the possibility that shared religious sentiments helped to enhance Liberals' political identity.

Two key elements were unity of purpose and leadership. The Bristol Gazette could comment in November 1835 that "for the first time in a number of years the party has become thoroughly united" and this was in large part due to the "unceasing vigilance and activity" of the association. The same key names of Liberal individuals tend to recur on petitions, requisitions, attending dinners, making contributions to subscriptions, and making speeches. As a group they were perhaps not much larger than 120 individuals, so one is talking about a politicized minority, but they formed a large
enough vanguard to organize effective campaigns and gain wider support. Within this group, key individuals formed the association's articulate inner core - men such as James Cunningham, George Sanders, George Thomas, Harman Visger, J.B.Kington, William Herapath and William Tothill. This core of influential and active individuals helped to create, at least temporarily, an effective and well-organized body.

The association had little difficulty in achieving favourable coverage and in publicizing its activities, and, as indicated above, there was no doubting the importance of an active press in reflecting and stimulating political activity. The Bristol Gazette was to some extent the mouthpiece of the association - both John Mills and his son were successively leading officers within the organization, and the Bristol Mercury, too, was sympathetic, although W.H.Somerton its proprietor was not in the inner councils of the local liberal party. A briefly successful newspaper, the Bristol Advocate, ran for about six months from 17 September 1836 - 11 February 1837, and was edited by J.B.Kington who had earlier worked as a journalist on the Mercury. Kington was an expert on the arcane workings and abuses of Bristol's corporation being the anonymous 'Burgess' who published 'Thirty Letters on the Trade of Bristol : The Causes of its decline, and the means of its revival' in pamphlet form in 1834, the letters having originally appeared in the Mercury. He concentrated on what he knew best and there were lengthy reports of the proceedings of the Town Council, Bristol's charity Trustees, and on the Municipal revision. The first issue of the paper sold 2,700 copies and by Christmas 1836 its average circulation was 2,300 copies a week, which made it the fifth most widely circulated provincial newspaper in the country and the most popular paper in the West of England. According to Tait's Edinburgh Magazine at the end of 1836, the success of the Advocate was evidence that "Liberal principles are gaining many converts in Bristol". The Advocate had issued 10,000 copies of its prospectus in July, in which the key message to reformers was 'Look to the Registration', and it boasted that "as a political organ, it possesses the confidence of a powerful and organized body of politicians" - a reference to the Bristol Liberal Association. The paper folded not because it was an unsuccessful business venture, but through Kington's ill-health.

Despite the fact that Tories both publicly and in private poured scorn upon the gathering, the dinner given by Bristol reformers to
Lord John Russell in November 1835 was a further significant landmark in the revival of liberal fortunes in Bristol. Firstly it was an enormous coup for the city to persuade Russell to attend a dinner in his honour in order to receive a candlestick paid for by a public subscription commenced in April 1835, in admiration "for the manly integrity and able generalship" he had shown during the passage of the Reform Bill. Russell spoke in public rarely outside the House of Commons. Secondly, the dinner acted as a kind of catharsis for Bristol Liberals - as the Bristol Mercury reminded its readers:

"As a body the Bristol reformers have been held up as composed, for the most part, of a mass of reckless adventurers; and more especially has this been the case since the lamentable riots." (77)

The visit helped to restore self-respect, self-belief, and Bristol's good name among reformers. Naturally the occasion received national coverage, and Bristol could feel that it had received the official imprimatur of approval. The printed address to Russell noted that:

"Union for common objects, and the relinquishment of all Separating Questions will form our Motto, and will be the Motto of all throughout the Kingdom who seek Reform in order to preserve and renovate". (78)

There were the usual mixed reactions to the dinner in the press; for the Bristol Gazette it was a "splendid demonstration of feeling", whilst the Mercury described proceedings as "calculated to produce the happiest effects to the liberal cause, not in our own locality merely, but in every county and city of the Empire." The paper further described the good order which prevailed, the "elevated and dignified tone of the speeches", and "the respectability and wealth of the persons present". Conversely, for the Bristol Journal the dinner was "one of the most vapid, uninteresting entertainments imaginable", which the elite of respectable Whig Reformers had ignored. Henry Bush in his private reports to Vyvyan had similarly predicted that "in point of respectability they will cut a sorry figure" and subsequently described the dinner, as "a sad failure... the subscribers are dissatisfied at not being present when the candlestick was presented, the Rads by his coming in a back way and avoiding them, and the Liberal Club thought his speech too Conservative". There may well have been some grains of truth in Tory criticisms - even an ally of Russell described the early part of his speech as "languid and ineffective" and the liberal Bristol press reacted defensively to the Tory list
of prominent names who did not attend, by publishing their own compilation of families who did attend ("the Rickettses, the Castles, the Ashes, the Fripps, the Sandersons, the Brucees, etc., are not altogether unknown or unrespected in this city")\(^1\). Setting aside the contrary interpretations however, Russell's visit was a major event for Bristol, which inspired comment and discussion at a time of high political excitement in the city. One gets a taste of this in the reaction of the poet Thomas Moore, who was staying with Russell at Bowood, to his day in Bristol before attending the dinner:

"Could collect from the Bristolians I talked with that nothing could be more bitter and internecine than the state of feeling between the two parties among them at present. No bells were suffered to be rung during this day and one hot churchman had got the bell-ropes of two steeples in his house to prevent the possibility of a single ring for the Rads." (82)

Although there were no bells, cannons were set off throughout the morning, and from some of the the ships in the harbour. The dinner was attended by nearly 500 people and included Lord Ebrington, Lord Segrave, J.T.Leader, Edward Protheroe, the Hon. Grantley Berkeley, and all the key Bristol Liberals. It was an event that was looked back on with some awe and affection.

Bristol's municipal politics before and after the local government reform of 1835 have been fully and expertly analysed elsewhere by Dr. Bush\(^4\) and it is only the ramifications for liberal parliamentary politics that will be discussed here. Bristol was used both by contemporary politicians, such as Lord Melbourne, and by later historians such as the Webbs, as a prime example of the incompetence and partisanship of unaccountable local corporations.\(^5\) Unrepresentativeness, extravagant feasting, and inefficiency were, of course, by no means unique to Bristol, and nor was local government before 1835 as universally bad as reformers painted it,\(^6\) but the riots of October 1831 had turned critical eyes fully upon the city. The visit of the Municipal Commissioners to Bristol in September and October 1833 elicited some activity from reformers, although the Mercury's recommendation to form "a permanent committee to collect and arrange evidence with the view of facilitating the labour of the commission when it arrives", was not acted upon. Nevertheless, Daniel Burges, a leader of Bristol's freemen, later asserted that the commissioners while in Bristol "were in constant communication with persons [ie. Reformers] not in open court", and the Tory mayor of Bristol, Charles
Payne, wrote in June 1835 that the commissioners' conclusions had been drawn "from authority of a doubtful character and obtained in an indirect and partial manner". Individual reformers had clearly been active behind the scenes. With all the disagreement in Bristol over the nature and effects of local government reform in the mid 1830's, municipal activity was inextricably linked with parliamentary and national efforts. The same individuals were active in both areas and the driving force which motivated many individuals into political activity was the possibility of achieving realisable and desirable local goals. As a leading authority on this period has observed, "the limited political world of parliamentary elections... was not a political boundary recognized by contemporaries". Activists saw municipal politics as part of the wider political confrontation. Contentious issues were at stake and unsurprisingly the whig government and Bristol's Tory council clashed. The Bristol Liberal Association played a central part in much of this conflict, particularly since Bristol reformers had a continuing grievance even after 1835. Bush shows how the revising barristers at Bristol, under pressure of time, subjected to clever manipulation by partisan churchwardens, and aware that they had been told to take account of the rateable value of properties at their discretion, approved a politically biased allocation of municipal seats to wards. Thus, for example, the wealthy Clifton Ward allotted one councillor to 216 rated properties whilst St. Philip and Jacob's Ward allotted one to 1,253. The barristers later admitted a discrepancy but "no more than was warranted by discretionary powers given them in the legislation". The result was very rough and ready estimates of wealth that were inconsistently applied in different towns. Bristol Conservatives also further benefitted from an aldermanic system which exaggerated the slender majority they achieved following the election of November 1835 after the defection of a single liberal, Christopher George. In 1837 the Liberals were actually two ahead on the basis of councillors elected but the Conservatives maintained a majority by their earlier nomination of eight aldermen. The Bristol Liberal Association dealt directly with the whig government and, in an atmosphere of political rancour, subsequently capitalized on opportunities to dominate both the magistrates bench and the Charities' Trustees. It lobbied for a simplification of the registration procedure and an alteration in the unfair division of wards by holding public meetings in February 1836 and June 1837 and petitioning. The selection of Bristol's magistrates became a
matter of heated debate in the House of Commons in March 1836 with exchanges between Sir Robert Peel, Lord John Russell, and Sir Richard Vyvyan. Twenty-four names were recommended to Russell by Bristol's town council - 12 liberal, 12 tory - but Russell had excluded 6 tories from this list, most notably the stalwart Alderman Daniel. Daniel himself remained phlegmatic ("Being a marked character... I am in no way surprised at the proceedings in the Home Office") but other Bristol tories felt genuinely embattled by the whig government. The rejection of the magistrates followed the loss of Bristol's See in an ecclesiastical re-organization, and a threatened attack on her Select Vestries.92 Peel and Vyvyan were unable to explain the principal of exclusion other than on the grounds of political considerations (Vyvyan charging Russell with having "corrupt motives"), and Russell, unprepared to go into details, did not deny that he had been in communication with officers of the Liberal Association.93 According to Henry Bush, writing to Vyvyan before the debate:

"the general belief is that Cunningham, deputed by the Liberal Association went to the H.O. to get as many of the Conservatives struck off as possible and that Lord John acted upon his representation".

Another Bristol tory considered that Russell's desire to represent Bristol was the motive for his favouring 'Radical' magistrates94 and this had been a matter of speculation in Bristol for some months. The association denied making any approach to Russell, but it seems probable that he was asked whether he would be willing to stand as a candidate, and that he did not reject the overtures out of hand.

The selection of magistrates remained a problem elsewhere. When the tories regained power in 1841, it was said that Graham, the Home Secretary, and Lyndhurst, the Lord Chancellor, embarked on a mass creation of Tory Magistrates causing "howls and shrieks" from the Whig-Radical press. The government organ, the Morning Herald defended this practice, not on the grounds that it was necessary to create Tory magistrates to balance the recent run of liberal appointments, but on the grounds that the bench should be impartial.95

A further row blew up in Bristol over the composition of the Charity Trustees to be appointed by the Court of Chancery in 1836. Bristol Liberals had long nursed a grievance about charitable awards being made for political reasons. For example, in 1833, of 80 names published as receiving gifts, no more than 6 were freemen who had voted for a reforming candidate. Of the last 45 recipients of the Peloquin
gift for poor lying-in women, 35 had conservative husbands and only 3 liberal. The council again submitted two balanced lists of nine members apiece but the Lord Chancellor required an odd number of trustees, and when the Liberals suggested an 11:10 split in their favour, the conservatives in pique resolved that the council would have nothing further to do with proceedings. The Liberals thus secured a disproportionate 18:3 majority of the Trustees which could be seen as revenge for their treatment at the aldermanic election.96 At the 1837 election the Mercury made much of the fact that the charity Trustees were not liberal. The charge that the Trustees had been guilty of corruption and undue influence at the election formed the basis of the Tory petition against Berkeley's return. The fact that 14 members of the Liberal Association and Berkeley's election committee were also charity trustees was certainly outwardly suspicious, as was the fact that the Liberal Association carried on its proceedings under the same roof as the business of the Charity Trustees was conducted. But the petition against Berkeley failed and when the Bristol Journal repeated its accusations against three individual trustees, it was successfully sued for libel in 1839.98 Overall it can be seen that municipal disagreements kept party strife at a high pitch, and that activists on both sides wanted to treat municipal affairs in the mid 1830's within a party context.

It is a point of some importance that Francis Henry Fitzhardinge Berkeley became a candidate at Bristol in the election of July 1837 under the auspices of the Bristol Liberal Association, through an application made to his elder brother Lord Segrave, Lord Lieutenant of Gloucestershire; Berkeley was happy to admit the connection and was full of praise for the association. Berkeley's election committee was composed of the central committee of the Liberal Association with the addition of three of four extra individuals. At the previous elections in 1832 and 1835 candidates such as John Williams, a London lawyer and John Cam Hobhouse had been selected haphazardly at the last moment, had no connections with the city, and could not provide independent finance for their campaigns (in the case of Hobhouse he never came to Bristol in 1835 and was busy campaigning far more seriously for his election at Nottingham).99 It was a sound tactical move by the liberals to put up only one candidate, firstly because they could represent this action as an indication of moderation and generosity to the Tories - the representation of Bristol could be shared; secondly, it ruled out internal divisions among the reformers,
and thirdly, it effectively dished traditional Tory tactics as expressed by Bush in July 1835:

"If the Rads bring forward two candidates we can either support the best man, or put up at the last hour a second Bristol man. By this plan the respectable whigs will not join the Rads..." (100).

John Cunningham, President of the association, was reported as saying that they had been attentive and assiduous for weeks and months in seeking out a suitable candidate, although he qualified this by adding that the Liberal association had no intention of dictating to electors (a fear circulating in the mid 1830's was that the country was in danger of becoming a victim of 'Club Government')101. Berkeley had an additional recommendation in that he was from a family of property and means and was thus difficult to depict as a dangerous revolutionary - he was unlikely to wish to destroy the institutions of a country in which his family had a considerable stake. One can, however, treat the impression given by Cunningham of a rigorous and methodical selection process with a degree of healthy scepticism. Lord Segrave related at a Stroud dinner in August 1837 that the Bristol Liberal Association had come to him a month earlier, asking for Augustus Berkeley to represent them. Only when Augustus declined did they ask for Henry: "They did not know my brother even by sight - they took him on trust - on the character of his family." 102 The association's knowledge of Henry's opinions were thus less than comprehensive - he had only recently returned from America - although as it turned out his opinions and general demeanour fitted the bill nicely, and he served successfully as Bristol's M.P. for the next 33 years until his death in 1870.103 What the association wanted therefore was any Berkeley in order to guarantee respectability, a local connection of sorts (the Berkeley's were historical benefactors of Bristol, although in fact had a much great involvement in the rival town of Gloucester),104 and financial backing. Segrave benefitted considerably from Whig patronage in the 1830's - he was granted a peerage in 1831 and the Lord-Lieutenancy of Gloucester in November 1835, whilst in 1841 he was created Earl Fitzhardinge.105 Grantley Berkeley later argued in his memoirs that Segrave had made a bargain with the Whig government that if he returned four of his brothers to parliament in support of liberal opinions, instead of the existing three; he would be created an earl, and that thus his support for F.H.F. Berkeley at Bristol was
part of a deal. The diarist Greville alleged that a similar 'quid pro quo' had gained Segrave his Lord-Lieutenancy which he viewed as "disgraceful" and a return to "all the most objectionable features of the old BoroughmanagIng system". Certainly members of the Berkeley family were returned for West Gloucestershire, Bristol, Gloucester, and Cheltenham, and Segrave eventually got his earldom, but it is not certain that there was a clearcut connection. Grantley Berkeley was a partial witness, and his falling out with his elder brother in 1847 had added yet another scandal to the family's colourful recent history. Moreover, it seems that Berkeley had every intention of repaying his brother for the expenditure of £1,500 at the 1837 election.

The key point that the Liberal Association had recognized was that a Berkeley guaranteed impressive financial support, so that, for example, when Joseph Parkes heard in September 1837 that there would be a scrutiny petition against Henry's return for Bristol, he remained unconcerned "Lord Segrave will pawn his drawers and Mrs Bunn's shift rather than lose a seat! Much to this effect he told a friend of mine last week."

The attention which the Bristol Liberal Association gave to the registration procedure in 1835 and 1836 was the main reason that they were able to regain their parliamentary representation in July 1837. Gains from the Courts of Revision were 349 in 1835 and 156 in 1836, mainly among household voters - significant increases given that F.H.F. Berkeley was only 56 votes ahead of the third candidate, William Fripp at the election. The Bristol Tories more or less maintained the freemen vote, and the Liberal Association had to refute charges that they wished to disenfranchise freemen. Similarly, attention to the municipal register meant that the Liberals only narrowly failed to gain a majority at the first municipal elections in November 1835, despite an allocation of councillors to each ward that was weighted in favour of the Tories (which defeat, however, had serious long term consequences), and gained four seats in 1836. Henry Bush continued to be sanguine in 1835 describing the result of the registration as "perfectly satisfactory" and estimating that the tory majority still stood at 1,000. He admitted, however, that the Liberal Club had been active and commented that "there is as much excitement with our committees as if an election were going on". Reformers had improved their position markedly among householders in Bristol's
three most radical parishes "by the Liberal Association paying
taxes to a large amount".\textsuperscript{112} A leader of the Bristol freemen,
although presenting an encouraging impression of increasing Tory
strength, admitted that "the exertion of the Liberals has been great
indeed and the number of objections they threaten us with, if
established, may diminish our increase".\textsuperscript{113} At the first annual
meeting of the association, in July 1836, the central committee
reported that much had been effected for reform - in particular,
registration successes at a municipal and national level.\textsuperscript{114} And
Henry Bush recorded in August 1836, "The Radical party to qualify
for the municipal elections have paid their taxes much better than
last year and will have the majority of our new householders."\textsuperscript{115}
The Bristol Advocate reported triumphantly:

"The battle of the constitution, said Blackwood, must be
fought in the Registration courts, and the reformers of
Bristol have fought it there - and won!!" (116)

The association provided information to electors unsure of their
voting qualifications, and publicized the conduct of individual
collectors of poor rates who raised difficulties and obstructions
to the payment of taxes and right of being on the register. Im-
portantly, the association organized on a ward and parish basis -
ward meetings took place - and they were now prepared to carry out
the monotonous but necessary business of knocking on doors to establish
the correct residence of freemen. The report of the Central Committee
to the second annual meeting contained copious information relating
to work on the parliamentary register and acknowledged the work of
parochial committees. Since municipal elections were new, and the
arrangements for parliamentary elections had been altered (by 1837
polling took place only on one day, whereas earlier in the century
it could be spread out for well over a week) electors needed to be
educated on the logistics of voting, and political associations
had to organize accordingly. The Bristol Mercury, commenting
favourably upon the work of the Bristol Liberal Association in
this respect in 1836 referred to:

"the admirable tact and the judicious and excellent
arrangements that enabled the voters to poll precisely
where they were wanted and at the right moment". (117)

The association also recognized the importance of engaging the
support of Bristol trade societies in support of a Liberal candi-
date - the last time they had been effectively mobilized as a force
in Bristol politics had been the General Election of 1831 when they had almost unanimously called for reform, and yet had swung back to traditional conservatism, or a more subdued political role after 1832. After the election of Berkeley, Bristol Liberals achieved further success in the local elections of November 1837 when they gained a seat in the predominantly Tory Clifton ward. The Mercury saw the result as a demonstration of the "substantial strength of the Liberals in this city, and of the ability with which they are marshalled and led". Liberals looked forward to the future; seven out of the eight aldermen who were due to retire in 1838 were Tories, and the Liberals had only to retain their ground to choose new aldermen from among their own friends and achieve a majority on the council.

The liberal breakthrough in 1838, however, was never achieved. They actually lost two seats in the municipal elections of November 1838, having already lost a seat in a local by-election six months earlier. Overall, the position of liberals on the Town Council collapsed between 1838 and 1841. In February 1837 the Tory majority of 34:28 was only sustained by the fact that they had nominated all eight aldermen in 1835; by November 1841 the Tories had a majority of 51:13. The municipal elections of November 1839 were particularly disastrous with seven liberals being displaced. One is left asking the question, what went wrong?

Initially liberal successes had continued early in 1838. The association formed a committee to combat the Tory petition against Berkeley's return and successfully organized their M.P.'s defence. They proved to be lucky in the membership of the House of Commons committee which heard the petition in that it was composed of 8 Whigs and Liberals to 3 Tories. This petition and subsequent legal actions was said to have cost William Fripp's supporters £12,000, but its defence must have cost the Liberals a lot of money as well.

Nor was it a problem that Berkeley was an unsatisfactory or unpopular M.P. His attention to the constituency needs of Bristol erased his reputation as a 'stranger', a circumstance that had counted against Romilly in 1812 and Hobhouse in 1832. In February 1838, for example, he was thanked by a deputation of Directors of the Bristol and Exeter Railway Company, and in April 1838 he secured an appointment to Bristol's customs house. In May 1840 he moved the third reading of a Bristol and Exeter railroad bill, in February 1841 he presented a bill concerned with the Clifton Suspension Bridge,
and a month later spoke on the Severn Navigation Bill. His support for Bristol's sugar and West India interests even overrode his personal commitment to Free Trade and the repeal of the Corn Laws, and in the key vote on the Sugar Duties in May 1841, when the Whig government were defeated by 317:281, he spoke against the ministry, much to the disappointment of the principled Bristol Mercury. He was to hold on narrowly to his seat at the General Election of July 1841.

One reason for the failure of the liberals to make a breakthrough in 1838 lay in the fact that they were ill-served by the municipal revision of October 1838. It was alleged by the Bristol liberal press that the Tory mayor J.K. Haberfield robbed hundreds of their votes by tolerating, if not encouraging, delay in the revising court, because he realised that the revision would be detrimental to his party. Of 2,600 objections of various kinds only 780 were disposed of after 11 of the 13 allotted days, and, in the end, the 1838 municipal elections were conducted on the basis of the 1837 electoral roll. But although the liberal cause was undoubtedly hindered by this technical chicanery, it is fair to say that there were strong hints that all was not well among Bristol reformers before this. Nothing was heard of from the Liberal Association, for example, after March 1838 until the local elections, and there was a lament in the Mercury that, "if the Liberal party hope to thrive in the city, they must help one another more than they at present do..." At a dinner in Berkeley's honour, in January 1839, the Liberal Association was not mentioned and there was a reference to "some dangerous and extreme principles and feelings now afloat." In May 1839 the Bristol Journal reported that the association had changed its name to the 'Registration Club' and saw this as symptomatic of the unpopularity of the 'Liberal' tag. The Mercury denied the change of name but was unable to say anything more positive than that the association was still in existence and that "the rallying point was never more needed than now". The figures published in Fraser's Magazine for the parliamentary registrations of 1838, 1839, and 1840 showed conservative gains in Bristol in each of these years, amounting to a net gain of 171 votes and confirm the view of slackening liberal efforts. It did not reflect well on the strength of the liberal cause that July 1839 saw the formation of a Bristol Liberal Protection Society, to give assistance to members who suffered in
consequence of a conscientious Liberal vote (in imitation of the Conservative Operatives Society). The disastrous municipal elections of 1839 reflected very badly on liberal organization, and the Mercury admitted "an unfortunate departure from the mode of filling up the claims which had hitherto been employed on the liberal side". In this way a large number of votes had been lost. The remedy lay in the reorganization of the liberal party "so as to be entirely prepared for all future emergencies and contingencies". This was whistling into the wind. The Liberal Association was defunct beyond this point.

Several local causes of the decline of Bristol liberalism in the late 1830's can be cited. Significantly there was a fracturing of the alliance between Bristol's middle and working classes, and hence of unity on the 'left' of politics. Chartism in Bristol never generated mass support, although the fiery Henry Vincent expressed a determination through his speeches and newspaper, the Western Vindicator, to "rouse the people of Bristol from the sleep in which they had too long lain". Nevertheless, the failed endeavours of Bristol Chartists to gain support through night-time meetings on Brandon Hill, preceded by torchlight marches through the streets headed by music and banners, when combined with rumours of military drilling, generated concern among Bristol's propertied classes. The mayor reported to the Home Office that several inhabitants were "much alarmed" and feared "serious riots". These did not materialise and little came of chartist efforts in Bristol, where they were divided amongst themselves. They did, however, effect the liberal cause both in a general and specific sense. The general atmosphere of social harmony and co-operation temporarily disappeared. For example, in December 1837 the Bristol Mercury had dwelt upon the virtues of Bristol's working classes, and their steady and praise-worthy efforts to acquire knowledge. The following month the paper, together with Berkeley and leaders of the Liberal Association gave strong backing to a Bristol Improvement Society which aimed to disseminate cheap and useful information. But the Mercury became increasingly critical of chartist methods and leaders in 1838/39, ending up by describing them as "misguided men, acting under the instigation of the misleading miscreants who live upon their victims..." The Chartists also had the power to damage the liberal cause in a more obvious sense. After a series of arrests of prominent chartists in the summer of 1839, in October the local chartist
branch issued an address advising voters in the municipal elections to keep out the liberals. Chartists claimed credit for the big liberal losses, especially in Bedminster. They also helped to muffle the liberal voice on the Corn Laws and other issues. As usual, Bristol reformers were slow in moving into action to oppose the existing Corn Laws. After Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds, and Sheffield had all come forward the Mercury lamented, "Is Bristol going to do something, anything, or nothing, with regard to the Corn Law?... Where are those who ought to move in this matter?..." The following week saw the hurried formation of a Bristol Anti-Corn Law Association composed predominantly of "respectable merchants, manufacturers, tradesmen etc..." The same month Berkeley presented a petition against the Corn Laws from 5,000 Bristol Operatives, and in April 1840 numerous Bristol petitions were presented to parliament against the Corn Laws. Bristol Chartists such as William Morgan, a tin-plate worker, and Felix Simeon, a printer, however, were able to hijack liberal meetings. For example, at an Anti-Corn Law meeting in March 1840 chartists carried an amendment in favour of the Six Points and dismissed Corn Law repeal as "a bribe to the working classes". They had used a similar tactic ten months earlier, at a meeting of Bristol Liberals convened to send a loyal address to Queen Victoria on the resolution of the Bedchamber crisis. Berkeley, although he declined to vote for the People's Charter, strove, fairly successfully, to steer a middle course in that his speeches showed a concern for constitutional reform, and he gained support from his identification with Corn Law repeal. At a major meeting attended by an estimated 5,000 people, in Bristol in June 1841, addressed by Cobden and Bright, Cobden praised George Thomas, Berkeley's right-hand man as a pillar of the League. A final point to make as to the local causes of the decline of Bristol Liberalism, is that momentum was able to be maintained so long as they thought that they had a chance of capturing control of the council, and thus consistently sought to make party capital. Once it became clear that they were not going to overthrow the Tories, the Liberals accepted their status as a semi-permanent minority. The onset of apathy and a decline of party fervour, together with a disinclination to contest unpromising seats, was hardly surprising in this context. The 1840's and 1850's were to see a decrease in local party rancour.
FOOTNOTES:


2. Sir. R. Heron, Notes (2nd. ed.) (Grantham, 1851) p. 232.


5. P. P. XXI (1838) Select Committee on Rating of Tenements p. 205.


13. Lambton MSS DP.15 No.1 Durham to Parkes 22 Nov.1834, DP.15 No.3 22 Jan.1835.


15. Ellice MSS (National Library of Scotland) 15032 Durham to Ellice 5 April 1835, 15033, 14 March 1837.

16. Lambton MSS DP.15 No.3. Durham to Parkes 16 Nov.1836.

17. The Times 27 Jan.1838; cf. D.N.B. VI pp.664-665 Edward Ellice (1781-1863) had been married to the youngest sister of Lord Grey (she died in July 1832) and was M.P. for Coventry from 1818-1826 and 1830-1863. c.f. J.C.Clarke, 'From Business to Politics - the Ellice family 1760-1860' (Oxford D.Phil., 1974).


20. Ibid. §5196 Ellice to Parkes 4 Dec.1835. 'Billy Holmes' was the tory chief whip, an adroit and skilful dispenser of patronage. 'The autocrat' was a reference to the 3rd. Marquess of Londerry, an arch-Tory and staunch opponent of Reform. He and Durham were surprisingly friendly for a number of years given the polarity of their political views, on the basis of their shared aristocratic and coal interests in the North-East. cf. A.J.Heesom, " 'Legitimate' versus 'Illégitimate' Influences: Aristocratic Electioneering in mid-Victorian Britain, Parliamentary History, VII, pt. 1. (1988), pp.282-305, esp. p.293.


22. Lambton MSS DP.14 No.2. Parkes to Durham 22 Nov. 1834, DP.14 No.5 21 July 1835.


25. Quoted in D.H.Close, "The Rise of the Conservatives in the Age of Reform", Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research XLV (1972) p.94. In December 1833, Parkes was preparing most of the articles on Municipal Reform not only for the Morning
Chronicle but also The Times and The Sun (Lambton MSS, Parkes to Durham 7 Dec. 1833).


29. Lambton MSS DP.14 No.2. Parkes to Durham 24 June 1833; Parkes MSS (University College Library) Parkes to E.J. Stanley 7 Sept. 1841.


31. e.g. Lambton MSS DP.14. No.4. Parkes to Durham 20 Feb. 1835.


34. Lambton MSS Parkes to Durham 23 Oct. 1835.


36. Lambton MSS Parkes to Durham 5 Jan., 19 July 1836 (York's local government in fact went Tory in the late 1830's, see below p.327).


38. For a history of the foundation of the Reform Club cf. Reid, Durham I pp.325-8, II 74-81, Fawcett, Molesworth pp.72-81; Buckley, Parkes, pp.134-140.


40. Ibid., pp.291, 298.


42. Parkes MSS Parkes to E.J. Stanley (Typescript copy ) 9 Oct.1836.


57. T.J. Manchee The Origin of the Riots of Bristol and the causes of the subsequent outrages (Bristol 1832) p.13.


63. Select Committee on Bribery at Elections P.P. VIII (1835) p.388.

64. Causes and Consequences of the Return of Two Tories to Represent the City of Bristol in Parliament (Bristol, 1835); Vyvyan MSS DDV/BO/61/55 H.Bush to Vyvyan 19 Sept.1833.

65. Causes and Consequences of the Return of Two Tories to Represent the City of Bristol in Parliament (Bristol, 1835) pp.5-6, 14.

66. P.P.1835 VIII Select Committee on Bribery at Elections p.381, Bristol Mercury 17 Nov. 1832.


68. A.B. Beaven, Bristol Lists: Municipal and Miscellaneous (Bristol 1899), pp.1, 41.

69. Anon, An Account of a curious and remarkable dream which happened to a Gentleman in this city concerning Lord John Russell's dinner (1835) in "Broadsides etc., Relating to Bristol 1836-1842 (British Library 1880 c.12).

70. W.D. Conybeare to W.V. Harcourt 23 March 1833, Quoted in J. Morrell and A. Thackray, Gentlemen of Science: Early Years of the British Association for the Advancement of Science (Oxford, 1981) p.115; Bristol Mercury 26 Jan.1833.

71. Bristol Mercury 21 March 1835.

72. Place MSS B.L. Add. MSS. 24936 J. Ham to Place 18 Aug.1835.

73. Bristol Gazette 5 Nov. 1835.

74. For biographical details of these and other leading Liberal councillors cf. G. Bush, Bristol and its Municipal Government 1820-1851 (Bristol, 1976). Appendix.

75. cf. 'A Burgess' [J.B. Kington], 'Thirty Letters on the Trade of Bristol, The Causes of its decline, and the means of its revival (1834); Ibid., Letters, Essays, Tracts and other Documents, illustrative of the Municipal History of Bristol and of the Trade of its Port (Bristol, 1836).

76. Bristol Advocate 31 Dec. 1836.

77. Bristol Mercury, 11 Apr., 14 Nov. 1835.

78. It may be an indication that Russell saw the occasion as of some significance that the printed address found its way into the private papers of Lord Holland (Holland MSS 51677 f.184).


82. Ibid., p.1730.


86. Bristol Mercury 29 June 1833; House of Lords Journals LXVII (1835) p.407; Vyvyan MSS 63/113 Charles Payne to Vyvyan 8 June 1835.


92. Vyvyan MSS Daniel to Vyvyan 63/213 26 March 1836; 63/210 Bush to Vyvyan 23 March 1836.

93. PD. XXXII 29 March 1836 cols. 772-792.


95. Morning Herald 8 Dec. 1841, J. Buckley, Parkes pp.178-79; Joseph Parkes to Ben Stanley 16 Dec. 1841 [I am grateful to my supervisor Mr. A. J. Heesom for these last two references].


97. Ibid.


100. Bristol Mercury 8 July 1837; Vyvyan MSS DDV/BD/62/36 H.Bush to Vyvyan 19 July 1835.

101. eg. Ellice MSS 15044 Edward Ellice to Joseph Parkes 1836 (n.d.)

102. Bristol Gazette 3 Aug. 1837;

103. cf. For Berkeley D.N.B. II pp.345-346.

104. For the history and lineage of the Berkeley family cf. V.Gibbs (ed.) The Complete Peerage... (1912) II pp.118-149; Burke's Peerage and Baronetage (1975 ed.) pp.245-247.

105. For biographical details of Baron Segrave c.f. D.N.B. II p.343.


N. Gash, Politics in the Age of Peel (1953) pp.211-213.


110. Parkes MSS, Parkes to E.J.Stanley 24 Sept.1837 (Mrs.Bunn was widely known to be Lord Segrave's mistress).


113. Ibid., J. Sircom to Vyvyan 62/57 23 July 1835.
117. Bristol Gazette 6 July 1837, Bristol Mercury 5 Nov. 1836.
118. Bristol Mercury 8 July 1837;

121. Bristol Mercury 10 Feb. 28 April 1838, 9 May 1840; P. D. LVII 17 March 1841 p. 327.
122. Bristol Mercury 8, 15, 22 May 1841.
123. Ibid., 13 Oct, 3 Nov. 1838.
124. Ibid., 3 Nov. 1838.
125. Ibid., 12 Jan. 1839.
126. Bristol Journal 4 May 1839; Bristol Mercury 11 May 1839.
127. cf. Fraser's Magazine XVIII (1838) p. 632, XX (1839) p. 637, XXII (1840) p. 628. The net gains were respectively 56, 104, and 11.
133. Ibid., 4 May 1839.
137. Bristol Gazette 17 June 1841.
"The old freemen have almost everywhere been accustomed to bribery, perjury, and treating, though their guilt has not been judicially established, like that of the burgesses of Liverpool and Warwick. They still maintain their privilege of the elective franchise, thanks to a Tory amendment of the Reform Bill, and they ought therefore to be solemnly warned, that they cannot resort to their old practices with impunity".

(The Times 19 March 1834).

"I consider that almost every place has a system of corruption peculiar to itself, where the same end is obtained, and the same system of corrupt practices, prevails, but in different modes".

[Joseph Parkes giving evidence before the Select Committee on Bribery at Elections P.P.VIII(1835)p.88]

"I have no hesitation in saying that there are a great proportion of the voters of York who would vote for the man who would pay the best".

[R.H. Anderson giving evidence before the Select Committee on the York City Election Bribery petition P.P.X (1835) p.487.]

More than one historian has demonstrated that the Reform Act of 1832 by no means eliminated election bribery and corrupt practices.¹ In many borough constituencies 'ancient rights' voters, narrowly reprieved by amendments reluctantly conceded by the Whigs during the reform debates, continued to exercise a powerful influence. York was one such constituency, where in 1836 there were 2,169 freemen registered as electors out of a total registered electorate of 2,838.² The political differences between Whigs and radicals in the 1830's, and the comparatively weak organizational efforts of the Whig/liberals compared to the Tories have been explored in the previous two chapters on Newcastle and Bristol. Both these features were also evident in York, and played a part in the liberal eclipse in the city. A further important element in the national revival by the Tories in the 1830's, however, was the way that they harnessed 'old voters' to their cause by traditional electioneering means. Nearly all of the larger boroughs in which the Conservatives gained seats in 1835, 1837, and 1841 contained large numbers of freemen. Enforcement of residence as a preliminary qualification in 1832 disqualified nearly half of the former freemen voters (outvoters made up 30% of those who voted at the 1818 General Election in York) but 'ancient rights' voters continued to exercise their traditional prerogative in 149 boroughs.³ They may have been a rapidly diminishing force after 1832 (of the total registered...
electorate in England by 1854 there were 333,757 £10 householders and occupiers and only 38,003 freemen but they were a significant electoral element in a number of constituencies in the short term. York was exceptional in having over 75% of its electorate composed of freemen in the mid 1830's, but even if, as at Newcastle and Bristol, the proportion of freemen voters was nearer 40%, this still made them a force which needed to be reckoned with. The connection between freemen and electoral corruption has been well-established. Poor freemen continued to expect lavish expenditure by candidates - 'treating', token employment, or direct payment. "Market politics" was insufficient in large constituencies, of course, to win elections on their own - issues, policies, opinions, and the individual candidate all mattered - but where a contest was tight, informed observers could often conclude, as did a liberal newspaper editor at York in 1835 that "gold alone has turned the scale".

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Candidates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1832</td>
<td>Edward Petre 1,505, Samuel Bayntun 1,140, John Henry Lowther 884, Thomas Dundas 872.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov.1833</td>
<td>Thomas Dundas 1,337, J.H.Lowther 846. (By-election)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1835</td>
<td>J.H.Lowther 1,499, John Charles Dundas 1,301, Charles Francis Barkley 919.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1837</td>
<td>J.H.Lowther 1,461, J.C.Dundas 1,276, David Francis Atcherley 1,180.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1841</td>
<td>J.H.Lowther 1,625, Henry Redhead Yorke 1,552, D.F. Atcherley 1,456.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: J.Vincent and M.Stenton (eds.) McCalmont's Parliamentary Poll Book: British Election Results 1832-1918 (Brighton, 1971) p.)

Evidence of the methods of bribery and intimidation is particularly rich for York. A Select Committee reported on a York City Bribery petition in 1835 and the minutes of evidence were published as parliamentary papers. The earlier account of the York Whig Club has established that to be a successful candidate at York elections in the early nineteenth century was usually an expensive business (see above p. 56). Lord Dundas reportedly told a deputation in September 1833 that he had spent £27,000 on his own three elections (in 1812, 1818, and 1820) and £7,000 for his son Thomas in 1830, and added that he felt unwilling to spend any more. The stark monetary realities
of York politics, which meant that in 1818 half of the 612 freemen voters who had promised to support W.B. Cooke broke their promises in the face of large-scale bribery by the tory candidate, were still a feature of the city's politics in the 1830's. Polling money was regularly paid to voters after they were 'set down' at the respective party's committee rooms. At York the payment was known as 'the guineas'; one guinea was paid for a split vote and two guineas for a plumper which tory candidates inflated to three guineas at the elections of 1818 and 1832. Usually this took the form of cash in hand, after the period had elapsed by which time an election petition to the House of Commons needed to have been submitted, but methods were changing. After the 1835 election, over 700 money letters and parcels were sent out by the committee of the tory candidate J.H. Lowther (although agency was difficult to prove) and delivered by the Post Office. Apart from creating bureaucratic difficulties for the York Post Office, the event created an enormous stir in the town. One witness giving evidence to the subsequent Select Committee commented that, "I cannot say that I ever knew a circumstance which produced so much sensation at York", although he qualified this by adding "with respect to electioneering" in answer to a subsequent question. It was the new and blatant mode of paying the money, rather than the actual payment, that was considered shocking. On other occasions payment of the polling money was disguised, or in kind. A successful York candidate after the 1830 election, for example, gave his money in the form of Christmas boxes.

Parliamentary select committees were a relatively new mechanism for checking electoral malpractice, having been suggested by Lord John Russell in March 1833. They were a means whereby voters could seek redress after the fourteen days had elapsed, within which time a petition against an M.P.'s return should have been presented and a committee chosen by lot under the provisions of the Grenville Act. There were in fact two petitions addressed to parliament from York in 1835 (an indication of the lack of unity amongst reformers). The first, signed by 63 people, was mainly the work of the newly formed York Society for the Diffusion of Political Knowledge (Y.S.D.P.K.), and supporters of the radical C.F. Barkley at the 1835 election. The second petition, signed by 45 individuals was chiefly the work of Quakers such as Samuel Tuke and Joseph Rowntree, through the Society of Friends. Such men had campaigned against election bribery and corruption for some time: a group of 103 electors, for example, had
signed a pledge in November 1832 opposed to measures "which are not only most unjustifiable and illegal, but highly calculated to pollute and destroy the morals of the public". Religious dissenters of various shades had been prominent in raising a subscription to honour Thomas Dundas for his unsuccessful 'purity' stand in 1832. A presentation took place in July 1833 with the Reverend Charles Wellbeloved presiding. It was unusual to grant a parliamentary committee for so few signatories (only about one in forty of the York electorate). There was more debate in the House of Commons over whether to investigate similar charges of electoral misconduct at Great Yarmouth, and in this case the petition was signed by 1,370 people. The secret nature of the payments at York seems to have been what persuaded the House of Commons to grant a parliamentary committee so readily.

The committee's report came to the fairly obvious conclusion on the effects of bribery,

"... that if two candidates with equal pretensions presented themselves at York, one of whom should countenance that practice, and the other refrain from it, an unfair advantage would be given to the party engaging in such unlawful proceedings, and that such advantage would decide the election". (16)

The report further noted that if the facts uncovered by the investigation had been established by legal evidence before an election committee, more than 1,000 voters would have been struck off from the pollbook "on the ground of pecuniary consideration held out and received". Out of the total of voters thus stigmatized, 855 were freemen. The committee considered recommending a bill of partial disfranchisement but in the end decided that "the exposure of the enquiry and the fear of consequences likely to arise from the repetition of such practices would have a salutary effect in the electors of York and bolster their sense of duty". Public rebuke and exposure of the electorate's misbehaviour was considered to be sufficient punishment. The tories emerged from the investigation relatively relieved and cheerful since the whig M.P., J.C. Dundas, had also been found culpable as having 'set down' about 300 of the guilty voters!

Some optimism was expressed by the committee and witnesses that attitudes towards election bribery were changing. For example, the following exchange took place:

"Q.5721 ' Has there been any change of opinion since the passing of the Reform Bill with respect to this practice?"
A. 'There is now a general feeling against it amongst all respectable people; there are some few partisans who do not feel it, but the great proportion of respectable people are desirous that it be put an end to.' " (19)

But the pious hopes of the "respectable" were not fulfilled. The liberal middle classes in York were not strong enough after 1832 to assert their authority on the constituency and incapable of diminishing the continuing demands of freemen even after 1835. In local government, a comfortable whig majority following the first municipal elections in 1835, was overturned by York tories in 1837 through adept organization and strong-arm electoral tactics. From 1837-1849 liberal opinion in the city was effectively flattened by the human juggernaut that was George Hudson, the 'Railway King'.

Many key liberal supporters, including William Hargrove and later R.H. Anderson, a former secretary of the York Whig Club, succumbed to the undeniable lure of lucre. Liberal setbacks provoked some attempts to regroup and seize back the initiative from the tories. The establishment of the Y.S.D.P.K. after the loss of a seat to the tories at the 1835 General Election has already been cited, and municipal setbacks eventually led to the establishment of the York Liberal Association in 1839. However, both of these clubs proved to be shortlived and hamstrung by internal differences of opinion. Nor did York's liberal middle classes assert their independence from aristocratic and county influences (c.f. above p. 56). Lord Dundas, subsequently Lord Zetland, may have announced his intention to cease payrolling liberal candidates in York, but the money continued to flow. In the period 1802-1848 there were only nine years when York was without a Fitzwilliam or Dundas representative. Two Dunidades - Thomas and John Charles - represented York for most of the 1830's, and in 1841 Sir Robert Heron could note in his diary, "John Dundas being about to retire from York, Lord Zetland consulted me about a successor, and I introduced my friend Yorke to him". Henry Redhead Yorke may also have been recommended by the Marquis of Normanby, the Liberal Home Secretary - a deputation from York were reported to have had an interview with Normanby in June 1840. York Liberals only narrowly managed to cling onto a single parliamentary seat in the elections of 1837 and 1841 by discarding the principles of 'purity of election' and resorting to traditional, 'impure' methods of electioneering. The continuing strength of the freemen thus dictated whig tactics in the constituency. Yorke, a Wakefield man, came to the city with a radical reputation (the Yorkshire Gazette summarized his views in June 1840
as "Vote by ballot, short parliaments, no corn laws, no church, and the education of all classes, sects, and parties according their several opinions").

but a reporter from The Times commented that he was only elected in June 1841 "by dint of as gross bribery as ever was perpetuated even in this city". The election was said to have cost Yorke over £10,000, and expenditure on the Liberal side was sufficient to shock even George Hudson, the probable architect of the money letters in 1835. He commented that:

"The Conservatives had been beat, but they were not beat with fair weapons - their opponents resorted to corruption and bribery of the most infamous kind - bribery stalked in our streets". (25)

It was hardly surprising that the whigs came to be seen as the anti-freeman party in the 1830's. They could not deny that they had made every effort to disfranchise freemen in 1831/32. Lord John Russell had wanted a uniform franchise qualification and stressed that many 'ancient right' voters came from the lowest classes and were liable to the greatest abuse. The freeman franchise was only retained after long debate and as a concession to the 'waverers' in the House of Lords. Conversely, Sir Robert Peel consistently supported the freemen's cause throughout the 1830's. He argued in 1831 that the whigs wished to disfranchise the freemen because of their tory affiliations, and it was a widespread tory assumption that freemen were natural allies, capable of resisting the power of new voters who they feared were likely to prove "low, dissenting whigs".

It is unlikely that Peel sincerely believed that freemen were "the purest and most incorruptible body of men in the country", but he could argue consistently that the hereditary franchise "established a connexion between degrees in society which the uniform character of the £10 qualification did not admit of". Even experienced and well-informed reformers underestimated the stubborn persistence of older patterns of influence. Joseph Parkes could comment of the 1832 legislation:

"We shall have hard work in Warwick, Stamford, and the smaller boroughs, and in the vile schedule B remnants, but through the bill (as a whole), I am more and more convinced that we shall ultimately kill and bury corruption."

It was perhaps significant that Parkes was least sanguine about those Midlands constituencies that he knew best. To Warwick and Stamford he added Coventry, where there was little prospect, in his view, of
reducing drunkenness and violence at elections in the immediate future - "that inherent nuisance Education and the Ballot can alone cure". 29

At York, the continuing rights and expectations of the freemen helped to channel the city's politics along idiosyncratic lines between the 1832 and 1835 General Elections. A huge crowd gathered to welcome Samuel Bayntun into York in November 1832 holding banners emblazoned "Bayntun, the perpetuator of Freeman's Rights". 30 The youthful Bayntun had been sponsored by York tories in 1830, but disappointed them by immediately and unequivocally welcoming the whigs' plans for reform in the House of Commons. He voted in the majority on 23 March 1831 when the second reading of the whigs' proposals passed by only one vote. 31 At the same time he had spoken up effectively on more than one occasion against the disfranchisement of future voters. 32 His return to parliament in 1832, however, second in the poll behind Edward Petre, the former Lord Mayor, was unusual. He was known to be financially embarrassed (he had come forward in 1830, according to R.H. Anderson, "with huge matrimonial expectations which were afterwards blighted"), 33 was dragged through the courts by members of his former election committee, and thrown over by his party, yet in 1832 he was a popular hero and returned virtually without expenditure. This was, according to one witness at the 1835 inquiry,"an occurrence that you can hardly look for again... I never knew an instance of that before in York." 34 The tory, J.H. Lowther, had consented to stand against two whig candidates on the understanding that Bayntun would not be a candidate and that "he should have the certain support of the blue interest". 35 Thus he was irked when Bayntun appeared and swung a large body of tory freemen in his favour. He had put down a marker for the future, however, and described himself on canvassing cards as "the Freeman's Friend". 36 Thomas Dundas's vote against perpetuating the freeman's right of suffrage, on the grounds that it was at odds with the principles of the reform bill, was held against him by many, as he had foreseen in a House of Commons speech, and the York Herald further attributed his failure in 1832 to his unwillingness to resort to bribery, runners, bands, and similar ruses. 37

A pollbook published by Edward Petre's election committee argued that an extra six months delay before the election might have ruined Bayntun's chances, but this could not be put to the test given his early death, at the age of 28 in 1833 from scarlet fever. 38 At the
subsequent by-election, in November 1833, Thomas Dundas was returned by a majority of 473 over J.H.Lowther. However, the result concealed considerable activity and angst behind the scenes. Lowther was nominated against his consent, after being requisitioned by 600 electors and George Hudson was confident, even at this early stage, that had Lowther fully committed himself, he could have been successful - "The result of this election is most convincing that, if we could have had Mr.Lowther with us, how easy his return would have been." Lowther's father seemed to agree with this analysis replying, "It is to me a matter of regret that my son was not upon the spot to avail himself of circumstances." Lowther himself took a more pessimistic view of his chances, perhaps fearful of being bounced once more into an expensive defeat by over eager local partisans. He wrote to his father:

"I send you the Herald to Wilton... for the express purpose that you might see the real state of feeling and parties and not be deceived by Mr. Hudson's, and the editor of the Yorkshire Gazette's reports of it..." (41)

Nevertheless Hudson could characterize the views of Lowther's supporters after this by-election as - "Let Mr. Dundas be quietly elected and reserve our strength for a future occasion with a certainty of success". Other correspondents noted that "the Dundas party is very flat" and referred to his "growing unpopularity". Initially Thomas Dundas had been less than confident that he would be returned at the by-election, and his committee paid scant attention to his purity pledges. In December 1834 he withdrew as a candidate for the subsequent General Election, aware that if he genuinely came forward on purity principles, "I should give such an advantage to my competitors as not only to endanger my success, but the success of the cause in which I am embarked." There was some irony in the fact that Thomas Dundas withdrew on the grounds that he stood no chance of success without recourse to corrupt practices, only to be replaced by a younger brother, John Charles Dundas, the sitting M.P. for Richmond, who was understood to be greater reformer, and yet made no such promise. Thomas Watkinson, chairman of C.F.Barkley's election committee in 1835, commented of John Dundas' motivation in coming forward:

"My impression at the time was, that it was to save some of the freemen who were going over, because, in looking over the list of voters for Mr. Lowther, I counted a great number who had always polled for the whig interest." (45)

The 1835 General Election at York, in addition to demonstrating the
effects of large-scale bribery, also highlighted once again the long-standing division between whigs and radicals in the city. J.H.Lowther topped the poll and was joined at Westminster by J.C.Dundas with the radical C.F.Barkley as the defeated candidate. Edward Petre had hoped to offer himself as a candidate again, but withdrew after an unsuccessful preliminary canvass. He had 'set down' in 1832 but did not subsequently pay up, which led to great disappointment amongst the freemen. Moreover, many of his votes in the House of Commons had not proved to be in accord with his liberal promises, leading to complaints that "our popular and liberal representatives should be such in reality and not in mere hollow-sounding professions". He voted in favour of the transportation of the 'Tolpuddle Martyrs' and continuing the impressment of seamen, and against a motion proposed by Joseph Hume to discontinue military and naval sinecures. More unforgiveably, the chairman of the York County Reform Association had voted against Charles Tennyson's motion to shorten the duration of parliaments and had been absent when George Grote's motion in favour of the secret ballot had been debated. C.F.Barkley came to York with letters of support from Joseph Hume and prominent London dissenters. He had hoped for a coalition with J.C.Dundas and an agreement to share expenses and encourage split votes. A formal coalition was rejected, however, and Barkley's immediate reaction to this decision was to withdraw from the contest, although he changed his mind within four hours. Nevertheless, the chairman of Barkley's election committee commented that "Mr.Barkley and Mr.Dundas came nearer together than we ever had two candidates on the liberal side in York", and, to J.H.Lowther, Barkley's candidature was evidence of the partisan nature of York politics:

"If any proof be wanting to show to what point party spirit may be carried it may be seen in the conduct of several of Dundas's friends who can wish to force a radical reformer of T.Wilson's choice upon the citizens of York..." (50)

However, the split between 'Old Whigs' and those who advocated additional reforms was once more apparent. As at Bristol, some 'old whig' votes went to the tories, whilst others were unhappy about endorsing radicalism. Hewley Graham, a leading member of Lowther's election committee put it thus:

"I fancy if we maintain our majority that Dundas' friends will plump him in order to keep him safe - and I see that few of the old whigs have voted. No doubt they are keeping back to see whether they can safely split with Barkley -
though many of them will split with Mr. Lowther. 51

Barkley received promises of 1,200-1,300 but polled only just over 900 votes. He was in a better position to petition against York's electoral system than previous candidates because he had genuinely "pure hands". 52 The petitions for inquiry into the 1835 election were represented as attacks by whigs and radicals upon the freemen. J.H. Lowther pointed out in the House of Commons that the great majority of those who signed the petitions had voted against him, and the following placard appeared in the city - "Brother Freemen! Who is it that would disfranchise us of our rights? We will answer that question by our votes at the next election". 53

Nationally, freemen came under attack from whig proposals once more in 1835. The Municipal Reform Bill proposed to preserve the financial and personal rights and privileges of all existing freemen during their lifetime, but in the future all the former methods of acquiring the freedom of a corporation were to be abolished, and no person could become a burgess except by being an inhabitant rate-paper of three years standing. In other words, all freemen's rights and privileges would lapse on the death of existing freemen, since after that there would be no such class of persons to exercise them. This carried the implication that the parliamentary freeman franchise would in due course be abolished, and The Times criticised the whigs for their "dirty work" in this respect. 54 Liberals anticipated that municipal reform would curb the powers of former tory corporations which had secured the votes of freemen through their manipulation of charitable funds. 55 Freemen seemed to be under fire from several directions simultaneously. It was hoped, for example, that successive bribery committees in the mid 1830's, investigating elections at Great Yarmouth and Ipswich, as well as York, by uncovering malpractice and threatening severe penalties if there were future misdemeanours, would work a salutary effect on their behaviour.

Joseph Parkes' twin optimism in September 1835 was typical:

"The York Committee Report tomorrow. The case is brought right home. These cases have done vast good - pari passu with the Corporation Bill. A new wing must be added to Newgate for the Bribers, so many have gone to gaol for non-answers in the last month! I don't fear the Freemen mess under the Corporation Bill. Being now righted the Town Councils will soon command them and much repress their corruption." (56)

The electoral effects of municipal reform were to fall well short of
whig/liberal expectations - indeed, municipal reform probably increased conservative influence amongst freemen voters rather than diminishing it as observers such as Parkes had hoped.\(^{57}\) The conclusion of the historian who has studied the General Elections of 1835 and 1837 in the greatest depth was that "it seems probable that in the English municipal boroughs as a whole, the liberals lost, by alienating the freemen, much of what they had gained by reforming the corporations".\(^{58}\) York tends to bear out this analysis. Even on relatively minor matters the whigs at a national level did not go out of their way to curry favour with freemen. In February 1837, for example, the M.P. for Coventry, William Williams sought leave to bring in a bill to repeal the 1/- duty on admission to the freedom of cities and boroughs in England and Wales, on the grounds that, since the freemen had been deprived of a substantial amount of their former privileges, they ought not to pay a tax on the remainder. The Chancellor of the Exchequer objected not on financial grounds, but that, "the records of parliament had shown that freemen were not remarkable for purity or deserving of exemption of any kind".\(^{59}\)

York's whig corporation received a relatively clean bill of health in November 1833 from the Government Commissioners appointed to inquire into its make up and functions. There were some critics, however, including George Leeman and R.H. Anderson, who blamed the corporation for the city's poor trading position, pointed out the poor maintenance of the River Ouse, and argued that the corporation should be more accountable for its expenditure of charity funds and trusts.\(^{60}\)

References to York's relative economic decline were nothing new, of course. In 1828 a French sociologist on a tour of Britain had observed, for example, that,

"...while commercial towns in England have grown enormously in recent years, market towns in agricultural areas have remained unchanged or even been reduced in size. York... has not grown at all." (61)

Nevertheless municipal reform was not a burning issue at York and it was barely referred to by any of the candidates during the 1835 General Election campaign.\(^{62}\) The corporation itself did not oppose the whigs' reforms of local government which ended both the right of corporations to admit freemen by gift or purchase and the freemen's former privileges of exclusive trading. When the first elections took place after the Municipal Reform Act to the new corporation, the whigs had an initial majority of six in a council of thirty six (21:15). Since the
majority proceeded to elect ten whig aldermen out of twelve, the whigs had a potentially comfortable majority of 31:17 in December 1835. However, their triumph proved to be short-lived. By November 1837 the tories had overhauled them.

The transformation in the parties' municipal fortunes at York came about for a number of reasons. The whigs had run a disorganized and lacklustre campaign even for the first municipal elections, and were fortunate to secure the majority that they did. Overall the tories polled more votes than the whigs over the city's six wards. Generally the whigs naively sought to view the elections in a non-political light. The Yorkshireman newspaper complained in vain that:

"It is the height of folly to suppose, and of falsehood to assert, that this is not a party question. In a place like York, where the distinctions of blue and orange are carried ostensibly, at least virtually, into every transaction of business, and even pleasure it would be worse than madness to be led away with the cry of this being a pure question of the public good". (63)

The whigs continued to be outmanoeuvred after the elections. Four whig councillors were immediately elevated to aldermen which necessitated by-elections. In fact five council seats were vacant since one whig councillor did not take his seat. The whigs' lack of preparation was demonstrated when the tories won four of these seats. The mismanagement of the municipal by-elections was an early indication of the whigs poor organization and planning. Their actual majority rather than being 31:17 was thus 27:21. They made a further mistake shortly after this in allowing the tories a majority on key corporation sub-committees such as the Watch Committee and the influential Finance Committee. The York Courant noted the tories' "union of purpose, and their close attention, hoping, to borrow a phrase from 'the Agitator', that it may act as a flapper to the somewhat tardy movements of the liberals". 64

Whig/Liberal lassitude contrasted with tory astuteness. A part of the Municipal Corporations Act, for example, ordered all voting papers to be kept and made available for inspection for six months after local elections. The tories carried out research and were able to use the information to good effect in exerting traditional electioneering pressures on individuals. 65 Whilst the balance of the council remained unchanged after the elections of November 1836, the tories had a majority of the elected councillors of 19:17. They capitalized on contentious local issues, claiming
credit, for example, for placing in the hands of freemen in several wards of the city, nomination of their own pasture masters for their respective 'strays' (corporation common land). Through their domination of the finance committee the tories convinced many voters that the whigs were wasting money, whilst representing themselves as economizers and champions of the poor freemen. They claimed to have saved the town from a larger police force, and to have held salaries down, and to have been instrumental in the abolition of the £1 duty paid by apprentice freemen. The reformed corporation had inherited a debt of £21,500 but the tories were able to place them in a bad light when they put the rates up. The whigs were thus to some extent the hapless victims of an anti-incumbency vote. The municipal elections of November 1837 followed vigorous tory campaigning in York in the July General Election, and tremendous tory efforts at the municipal revision in the summer of 1837. The whigs approached the elections apparently resigned to defeat, and they were duly defeated. The tories secured 10 of the 14 seats which were up for election, giving them an overall majority in the council of 25:23. Following the tory victory, George Hudson was elected Mayor on 11 November and the tories ensured that they outnumbered the whigs on all of the key committees. All the leading whig and liberal activists were excluded. The tories were to remain in control until the crash of Hudson's railway empire in 1849.

Local factors in the tory revival and whig malaise were supplemented, of course, by national issues which fuelled the whig government's diminishing popularity. At York the New Poor Law system, the perceived threats to the Church of England, and the whig alliance with radical and Irish M.P.'s, were all referred to in the local press and electioneering handbills. In the General Election of July 1837 J.C. Dundas only narrowly came second in the poll to J.H. Lowther thanks to substantial treating and bribery, and divisions in the tory ranks. It is likely that several of the poor freemen, in particular, were effected by the tory anti-Poor Law propaganda. Dundas was represented as a man who had done his best to disfranchise freemen, starve the poor in 'Bastiles' and separate families. David Francis Atcherley, who was called upon to stand in July 1837 by a requisition of 800 freemen was primarily an anti Poor Law candidate - one of his handbills concluded "Think of your wives, your children, the atrocious parts of the New Poor Law system." More improbably the Yorkshire Gazette portrayed Dundas, an advocate of the secret ballot, church
reform, and fundamental changes in Ireland, as a quasi-revolutionary - "He is a man after the heart of your genuine Destructive". Both at this election and the subsequent General Election in 1841, the tories derived some benefit at York - again, especially amongst the poorer voters - from the traditional 'Church in Danger' rallying call. There was a clear re-assertion of anti-catholicism in the city, stimulated initially by the influence which Daniel O'Connell and Irish Catholic supporters seemed to exert on government policies towards the Irish Church. In May 1835 the Yorkshire Gazette represented the Whig/O'Connellite link as a "Whig-Papal coalition" which endangered the church. The hostile response in the local tory press to O'Connell's visit to York in April 1836 was an indication of local anti-catholic feeling. A York Operative Protestant Association was established in the city. Several such organizations were established throughout the country after 1835 but at York the impetus appears to have come from working men themselves. The association held well-attended tea-parties in 1840 and 1841, which alarmed catholics and liberals, and helped to revive anti-catholic demonstrations on Guy Fawkes day.

Issues at York elections, only represented part of the equation. Surviving private correspondence of D.F. Atcherley provides clear evidence of continuing treating and bribery, despite the shock of the 1835 investigation. He considered petitioning against the return of J.C. Dundas following the 1837 election. Supporters informed him that,

"Freemen and electors were taken and treated with as much liquor as they could or would drink and several of them made drunk after the Election. They paid their voters as messengers, constables and runners". (74)

It was reported that Alderman Hansen, one of Dundas' most active supporters, offered to set a freeman's name down for four days - ie. 20/- - without requiring his services. Another correspondent noted that "Dundas having his quarters at his house was unquestionably most reprehensible and would look awkward for him before a committee". Dundas's chief election agent was reported to have admitted that, "they were quite in despair after the canvass in Walmgate having met with so many refusals that they believed he would not be returned." J.H. Lowther, too, was fearful of a further parliamentary inquiry into his activities. John Holtby commented that "His nerves are not cast in the same mould as yours; he dreads a parliamentary investigation, he was sickened with the last". Nevertheless, he pressed Atcherley to go on with his plans, urging him to
"... are you to study Mr. Lowther's peace of mind at the sacrifice of principle? You have a public duty to perform, one of principle and which must not be made subservient to his whims and fancies." (77)

There was considerable internal dissension amongst the tories - Lowther's and Hudson's group had offended Atcherley. None of the front rank leaders of the tory party in York had sponsored Atcherley's candidature or appeared on his election committee. It was revealed at Dundas's victory dinner that George Hudson had told the liberal leaders that only one tory would enter the field. 78 A.J. Peacock speculated that Hudson and his friends may have wanted the city to be represented by one liberal and one Conservative so as to have a foot in both camps in order to help with their railway schemes. 79

The traditional desire to keep down election expenses by a judicious political compromise may also have been a factor. In fact Hudson and other tory leaders did vote for Atcherley, but there were a large number of split votes between Lowther and Dundas, and it was reported that Dundas's supporters attributed their salvaging of his seat to the lack of union between Atcherley and Lowther - "they saw the division and took advantage of it". 80

For a variety of practical reasons, Atcherley eventually dropped the idea of petitioning parliament. His supporters pointed out how unpopular his actions would be in York - "Barclay [sic] made himself unpopular by pressing the petition after his defeat and had he offered himself a second time he would have been rejected". It was further noted,

"... you cannot convince our supporters that the result of the petition will not end in disfranchising the freemen... if Mr. Dundas is unseated they imagine the consequent result will be the freemen must follow". (81)

Petitions were difficult to prove and expensive - the whole amount would fall upon Atcherley, himself, and the Carlton Club, assuming that it would assist. Atcherley's own election committee had also treated voters and it was admitted that if he petitioned he would "do himself a great injury". 82 He eventually decided that discretion was the better part of valour, and that since the tide seemed to be running in his favour, he should await the next favourable opportunity. Holtby wrote that Lowther's supporters,

"... are sensible of their injustice to you at the last election and will make amends at a future period; they
are convinced of their past folly and if they were to act in the same manner at another election they would have to tremble for the seat of Lowther. We have now got a majority in our Town Council - at the last election we returned 10 out of 14. The Council has some interest at the elections; there are several individuals under the corporation who have always been opposed to us but now they must come round or dread the consequences". (83)

Not all Liberals were oblivious to the tory advance in York. There were some attempts to stem the tide and the usual exhortations from liberal newspaper editors. Individuals such as George Leeman, G.H.Seymour, James Meek, Leonard Simpson, R.H.Anderson, the Reverend William Hincks and R.E.Smithson were active in the Liberal cause at different times in the late 1830's, but, in general, Liberal activity was either weak or unsustained. Personal animosities made matters worse. Not only were York's two liberal newspapers at loggerheads(see above p.141-2) but the two most effective campaigners on the liberal side - R.H.Anderson and George Leeman - were not on speaking terms. Anderson had obstructed Leeman's attempt to become an articled solicitor after the latter had worked in his office for eleven years, which resulted in messy litigation and a case which was heard in the Sheriff's court at York in 1834. Leeman eventually qualified elsewhere. Later in 1834 when Leeman convened a meeting to decide upon ways and means of paying those men who had voted for Edward Petre in 1832 (Leeman had been his agent), Anderson issued a handbill describing his former junior clerk as "an habitual trickster and calumniator." The Y.S.D.P.K. had some success for a time. It aimed to watch over the votes of the city's M.P.s, maintain registration efforts through the Revising Barristers' Court, and prevent outvoters coming from a long distance to vote at future York elections. Reading rooms were established, and the society met monthly from January - June 1835 to discuss political subjects agreed by the previous meeting. It was involved in petitioning parliament over the 'sovereigns' and issued a general address in June 1835, but had lapsed well before the 1837 General Election. The Yorkshire Gazette had described the society dismissively as "a restless knot of radicals, contemptible in number and respectability". After Dundas's narrow victory in 1837, Liberals told one another that they should organize, but did nothing. When Dundas expressed his hope that a new political society would be formed, a representative of the 'old whigs' immediately declared that he considered such a club was "unnecessary". Complacency was diagnosed as a key reason for
Liberal municipal defeat in 1837, yet two months later a meeting in favour of the secret ballot could be described by the Yorkshireman as taking place in an "atmosphere of vacant listlessness".89

A further setback at the 1838 municipal election when the tories increased their majority by an additional seat, together with the shock of George Hudson manipulating a second term as Lord Mayor (see below p.335), stimulated the establishment of a York Liberal Association in January 1839. It was pledged "to carry out liberal principles and adopt measures for the advancement of the cause of Reform in York".90 One hundred and fifty members were initially enrolled, as the association consciously sought to rival the scope and appeal of the York Whig Club, with the additional intention of attending to the parliamentary and municipal registrations. There was some fighting talk from R.R.Pearce, editor of the Yorkshireman:

"It becomes then every Liberal in York to be up and doing. Let us have no coquetting; no more halting between two opinions, no more concession; but a manful and energetic fight for public principle... Let them rally and unite, and they will soon show that 'the splendid entertainments' of 'the most munificent Lord Mayor' etc. cannot seduce the city..." (91)

The association seems to have had some success during 1839 in maintaining Liberal morale - it met quarterly, enrolled new members, and district associations met on a monthly basis. A loyal address to Queen Victoria expressing confidence in the whig administration as regards their government of Ireland, received over 1,500 signatures.92 The loss of a further seat at the municipal elections of November 1839, however, following Hudson's manipulation of the annual revision of the municipal electoral roll, was a decisive setback.93 Despite the association's best efforts (one of its rules stated that tickets for its annual dinners should cost no more than 7/-) the membership remained socially exclusive. It did not secure any mass following. Ultimately, there were too many differences amongst Liberals by this stage. The Yorkshire Gazette enjoyed delineating the various 'shades' of opinion within the York Liberal Association which included:

"The Ministerialist whig, the Durham Radical, and the Chartist; the Ballot man and the open voter; the advocates of annual, triennial and Septennial parliaments; of the Ten Pound, the Household and the Universal Suffrage; the Precursor and the PURCELL; the O'Connellite and the favourer of Fergus; the adherent of Stephens and the applauder of the Poor Law gens d'armerie; the anti-bastile disciple of Mr.Hargrove and the doctrinaire of the rival Trumpery..."
school; the pauper's champion and the grinder of the faces of the poor; the liberal churchman, the wily but intolerant papist, the rampant Dissenter; the lordly lay-impropriator and the passively resisting Quaker; the Man of War and the smack of the kiss of peace; the Aristocrat and the Democrat; the Lord and the Leveller; the would-be Loyalist and the Republican; with a variety of other 'shades', are all to be 'united in one common bond' " (94)

By 1841 the organization of York Liberals was in disarray.
George Hudson had proposed J.H. Lowther as the Tory candidate on the hustings in 1835, 1837, and 1841 (Lowther in turn sponsored the York and North Midlands railway bill in Parliament in 1836). Hudson built up an immense fortune by promoting and taking over railways, and he skillfully channelled his influence in York through directorships, patronage, and electoral control. The railway offered employment for many — contractors, builders, and lawyers — whilst others such as shopkeepers benefitted indirectly. As Lord Mayor in 1838 and 1839, Hudson's junketing was on a lavish scale. On Queen Victoria's birthday in March 1838 the illumination of the Mansion House was a centre of attraction for the whole city, and two months later her coronation was celebrated in considerable style and at similarly considerable expense. Such entertainment offered the city's freemen and tradesmen relief at a time of economic recession. Few in York were able to withstand the combination of Hudson's economic leverage and his ruthless political power-brokering. The Yorkshireman, welcoming the end of his term of office, described him as:

"a hot partisan and political missionary in the chair of council, in the patronage of office, in public streets, newsrooms, and private houses". (97)

Many individuals were Liberals in name only, sycophantic followers of Hudson, wearing his livery, and boasting of the fact. At the highpoint of his influence in York the opposition in the council consisted of no more than four people. York's electors were by no means unique in demonstrating a narrow concern for their local economic interests. As Sunderland's M.P. after 1845 George Hudson held similar sway there, through his patronage of shipping, dock, and railway interests. Richard Cobden appreciated the attractions of Hudson as a parliamentary candidate in July 1845 and sympathized with the Liberal candidate:

"A more formidable opponent he could not have at present than the Railway King - He would go into the contest with an intangible bribe for every class. - The capitalists would hope for premiums - the smaller fry would look for situations for their sons in the vast railway undertakings over which he rules absolutely, and the iron, rope, coal and timber merchants will all bid for his patronage. His undetectable powers of corruption at this moment are greater than the prime minister's". (100)

Admittedly this was written at the height of the railway boom and of Hudson's personal powers, but it is not inappropriate to see him
possessing similar powers of patronage at York in the late 1830's.

Hudson could display a vindictive attitude towards those few
whigs and liberals who refused to kow-tow to him - for example,
C.H. Elsley, the town clerk, who was active in the York Liberal
Association. In February 1840, a dinner held in the Guildhall to
celebrate Queen Victoria's marriage was reported to have been
wrecked by Hudson in a display of "purse proud vulgarity". Elsley
had tendered apologies for the non-appearance of Lord Wenlock, the
Liberal Lord-Lieutenant of the West Riding, and later proposed a
toast to "Her Majesty's Ministers". Hudson refused to drink the
toast and launched into Elsley, referring to his "aristocratical"
connexions (he was a relative of Dundas). The diner's witnessed
a scene which the York Courant said beggared description - "all we
can say is, that we rarely, if ever, saw such a scene before the
hustings during a general election". On two key occasions Hudson
bent the law as Lord Mayor in order to get his own way. At the first
meeting of the corporation after the municipal elections of 1838 he
organized the agenda so that he was voted in as Mayor, for a second
year, before the appointment of new aldermen. His object was to be
the city's chief magistrate when the York and North Midlands Railway
opened. His actions were later adjudged illegal, but by the time
that the case came to court, in May 1840, he had been out of office
for six months. In October 1839 at the municipal registration,
the Yorkshireman argued that Hudson "set both law and reason at
defiance". He quashed 100 Liberal objections on the grounds that
York did not have a burgess list, its people were citizens. The
argument rested upon the semantic technicality as to whether York
was a city or a borough. It made little difference that the whig
Attorney-General confirmed the validity of the notice repudiated by
Hudson. After considerable Liberal registration efforts in 1839
they still lost one council seat. There was a bitter debate in
November 1839 as to whether Hudson should be given the traditional
vote of thanks for his time in office as Lord Mayor.

Neither Chartism nor the Anti-Corn Law League wielded much
influence in York, despite a certain amount of sound and fury. In
July 1839, when signatures were being collected for the National
Petition only 300-400 were obtained at a "sizeable" meeting. A
Chartist lecture and demonstration in June 1841 met with "strong
marks of disapprobation" from the audience, which showed according
to the York Herald that Chartism was "But at a low ebb in York".

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Chartism merely provided an additional element fragmenting Liberal efforts at unity and splitting the reformist vote. One of the reasons for the *Yorkshireman*'s hostility was that a local chartist organization provided competition for the York Liberal Association, as local leaders directed their efforts towards wooing the working classes. Speaking on a chartist platform in May 1841, Charles Stewart advised a meeting "to vote for the devil rather than a whig", and indeed the tory party in York benefitted from Chartist electoral support in June 1841.105 Whilst the Whig government was in power York's Liberals refused to declare for or against the Corn Laws. Agriculture was an important element in York's market-based economy and Liberal newspapers had shown little enthusiasm for reform of the Corn Laws before 1841. In 1839 the *Anti Corn Law Circular* criticized the editor of the *Yorkshireman* in a belief that he was sympathetic to agriculture.106 Individuals such as Yorke, R.R. Pearce, C.H.Elsley, Leeman, and others declared their conversion to the views of Richard Cobden on the eve of the poll, but the issue was unlikely to be a major vote-winner in the city. Certainly, at York, Liberal banners carried slogans such as "Yorke and Free Trade", but attempts to make play of the issue could equally well have been detrimental with some voters.107 The Chartists regarded the campaign of the *Anti Corn Law League* as got up by Liberal manufacturers who cried "cheap bread", when they really meant "cheap labour", and as a ruse that was deliberately devised to turn attention away from factory, Poor Law, and reform questions.

* * * * *

The political battleground in 1841 was relatively limited.108 By 1840, with property re-assuming its traditional influence, two-thirds of the English counties had been surrendered to the Conservatives, and *Fraser's Magazine* estimated that overall there were only about a hundred English and Welsh seats in doubt.109 Whereas 251 out of 401 constituencies were contested in 1837, only 188 were contested in 1841. The Conservatives gained 23 seats without a contest. Uncontested elections were often the result of the substantial dominance of one or other of the parties on the electoral register. As outlined above (p.281) the Conservatives grasped the potential of registration politics more fully than their opponents, especially in the early and late 1830's. The Conservative majority of around 78 in 1841 was based upon their overwhelming superiority
in the English and Welsh counties, and small English boroughs over 1,000, where they had been more assiduous than the whigs in their registration activities. Larger borough constituencies, and in particular freeman boroughs, just as in the pre-reform period, offered the most scope for contested elections and were more than usually susceptible to political swings. In 1818, for example, 41% of the government's gains (9) and 60% of the opposition gains (18) came in English freeman boroughs. Twenty-six out of the thirty-seven medium-sized to large English freeman boroughs of the unreformed political system, were cited in Fraser's Magazine's annual review of the registration from 1838-1840, as constituencies where a party ascendancy had not yet been established.

Conservative dominance in the English and Welsh counties in 1841 (following the election the whigs and liberals could claim only 21 out of the 158 M.P.s) was not matched by their performance in larger boroughs. In English boroughs of over 2,000 voters the Conservatives secured only 15 of the 58 seats, a decline of two since 1837 and one less than in 1835. In English boroughs of 1-2,000 the Conservatives held 29 out of the 63 seats, 3 more than in 1835 and 1837. On the other hand, those whigs who had favoured the gamble of dissolution in 1841 were convinced that the appeal of greater freedom of trade held forth in the budget would secure enough support in the larger boroughs to offset their losses in the counties. In fact the Liberals over-estimated the attractiveness of their proposals to replace the existing sliding scale of duties upon corn imports with a low fixed duty of 8/- per quarter. Joseph Parkes had predicted 31 borough gains but there were ultimately only 14. Recent analyses have demonstrated that the Corn Laws were the most conspicuous and commented upon issue of the 1841 election. However, they were not necessarily the decisive issue determining individual's voting intentions. At York it has been shown that the fate of the Corn Laws was only one of several important issues; the New Poor Law, the whigs religious policies, which had simultaneously provoked anti-catholic sentiments and disappointment amongst dissenters, together with the perceived attacks upon freeman voters, were all factors which weighed upon individuals' voting intentions. Over and above the political issues there were the unquantifiable effects of judicious expenditure by election candidates. The 1841 parliament was described as the "Bribery Parliament", and the Westminster Review concluded that:
The Annals of Parliamentary Warfare contain no page more stained with the foulness of corruption and falsehood than that which relates the history of the general election in the year 1841. (114)

The extent of bribery could result in a high degree of cynicism. Francis Place wrote to Henry Vincent who hoped to contest Banbury in the 1841 election but had little money:

"You talk like but too many others, as if honesty and patriotism were the rule among electors, while the fact is that they who are honest go for nothing. They balance one another, and the election is made by the rascals who ought to be transported for seven years and the candidates who pay them for twenty one years". (115)

Whilst these were partisan and exaggerated impressions, they also contained a large element of truth. Contemporary investigations, which followed revelations in the House of Commons by the radical M.P. J.A. Roebuck, demonstrated that there were a large number of "corrupt compromises" following the 1841 election. This was a process whereby the political parties through the Reform and Carlton Clubs traded off their respective indiscretions so as to avoid parliamentary scrutiny and the cost of contesting election petitions. 116

There have been few specific studies of the freemen as a political force, and it is a subject which would benefit from additional research. 117 They were viewed as a distinctive and influential section of the electorate, both in York and elsewhere. Henry Bush, the tory agent at Bristol could write optimistically in December 1834:

"The freemen we had at the last election we shall have to a man and I expect a majority of those who voted against us". (118)

The Bristol Society of Tory Freemen had been formed in 1832 and played a key part in Sir Richard Vyvyan's victory of December 1832 with the notorious "Bribery Box" and "Blue Beef" (see above p.291). Liberals at Newcastle, even in the 1840's, were penning appeals specifically to secure freemen's votes. 119 A large proportion of freemen, because of their position of economic dependence, voted at each election for the party supported by their employer or the candidate who offered the most attractive bribe. W.H. Ord (Junior) wrote to Lord Durham in December 1834, of undecided voters in Newcastle, that "the loose fish will go into the nets which are best baited and there are some three or four hundred of them or more". 120 Sir Matthew White Ridley's parsimony at Newcastle before 1832 had rankled amongst freemen and put his seat in some jeopardy. As Armorer Donkin, his election...
agent put it:

"The idea... exists among them that you are too careful of your money - or in other words - that you do not occasionally give them a 'blow-out' - or pay them some occasional marks of attention to keep them in humour..."

He noted that Cuthbert Ellison always went a little beyond Ridley in terms of expenditure "by which his popularity with the lower free-men has been increased, while yours has been diminished". In the mid 1830's, the tory John Hodgson owed his seat primarily to freeman rather than household voters. At the by-election of July 1836 at Newcastle, 69% of freemen voted for Hodgson in preference to the whig-sponsored candidates, as opposed to 37% of householders. In 1837 the whig William Ord was supported by 1,223 householders and 539 freemen, whilst Hodgson was supported by 1,075 freemen and 626 householders. W.L. Harle argued that the burgesses support was partly explained by residual loyalty to Hodgson dating from his taking up their freedom in 1830 and partly because they adhered to "the frivolous idea of returning a member for Newcastle, who shall be par excellence, the freeman's member".

It is hardly surprising that a large number of freemen adopted a mercenary attitude towards their privilege and it would be a mistake to apply late twentieth century standards of political morality to their behaviour. They were under a variety of pressures. Henry Morton, Lord Durham's well-informed agent, noted to his employer that:

"When an election takes place at Newcastle Mr. Cookson won't suffer the Liberal party to go into his works to canvass his workmen, he decidedly prohibits it, and uses all the intimidation and coetion [sic] in his power to compel his men to vote for the tory candidate most unscrupulously, & a number of the old freemen are about him who submit most readily to this dictation..."

Similarly as noted earlier, H.G. Ward reported that he had been warned by supporters in February 1837 not "to contend against the mass of corruption which I shall find amongst the freemen at Newcastle". In the same year, the Reverend William Shepherd, a veteran reformer from the time of the Concentric Society, reported that whig prospects in Liverpool were in danger and that there was "a need to disperse money among the older freemen". Some freemen, of course, did not welcome the political pressures which their status invariably placed upon themselves. The Yorkshireman could comment, for example:

"Is it not a fact that many people look upon the possession of the birthright of a freeman i.e. a vote, as a misfortune?"
Do not many neglect to register their votes, lest they may injure themselves by offending one party or another?" (126)

Moreover, freemen were not the only voters open to bribery and influence. Many of the liberal middle classes, qualified to vote as £10 householders, were similarly practically disfranchised in so far as they cast their votes not according to their own beliefs, but in the interests of the man who bought or controlled their suffrage.

An historian of the post-reform political system concluded that:

"except in the boroughs where party feeling was exceptionally strong, or where personal influence controlled the election, the result of elections depended very largely upon the amount of money expended in bribery". (127)

The evidence from York, and other constituencies that were the subject of investigations in the 1830's, supports this conclusion. G.H. Seymour at the York inquiry estimated that of 2,800 voters perhaps 1,000 were tories and about 700-800 "would vote for anybody that they can get anything by", the great majority of these being freemen. James Walker, an auctioneer, agreed that the "majority of voters in York are liberally inclined in politics but... they lean to the contrary side merely for the sake of gain." (128) The continuing importance of electoral bribery and corruption within the political system was thus a factor in depriving the liberal middle classes of the voice which the whigs had intended for them. Given that the true nature of political opinion could be distorted, historians should be wary in their generalisations about changes in public opinion. As The Times commented in its analysis of the borough results at the 1841 General Election:

"The boroughs are much more liable than the counties to be influenced by the spirit of local partisanship, which leads, in many instances, to returns affording no conclusive indication of the real state of public opinion". (129)

Grand theories of swings in national opinion are sometimes underpinned by less than substantial foundations. The Times switch to the Conservatives in 1834, for example, is often cited as a key indication of a shift in the public mood away from the whigs. Thomas Barnes claimed that he kept his finger upon the pulse of the nation through a network of diverse social contacts, and that the secret of the change in the paper's editorial line lay in the fact that he closely consulted public opinion. (130) Professor Gash referred to it in one volume as "that infallible barometer of public opinion" and in
another as "that great organ of middle class opinion". However, the editorial line of *The Times* was as much influenced by Barnes' quarrel with Lord Brougham, after the death of Brougham's brother, an employee of *The Times*, and the editor's agreement in 1834/35 with the Conservative government which secured the paper favourable treatment. In his analysis of the 1841 General Election, Gash noted that 44 Conservative M.P.s were returned for large towns with electorates of over 1,000 and represented this as demonstrating a shift in public opinion away from the whigs and towards Peelite Conservatism. Yet whilst it may have been the case in counties such as Oxfordshire that "after a brief flirtation with whiggish reform, electors embraced Peel's modernized, post-Tamworth Conservatism with some enthusiasm", and organized themselves with alacrity, there is no evidence for such assertions in boroughs such as York, Newcastle, or Bristol. Elections clearly turned upon a combination of personal, political, local, and national circumstances, but York in the 1830's indicates that they could often be determined primarily by local issues, local men, and local organization. H.R. Yorke did not narrowly secure a seat for the Liberals in 1841 primarily because the electorate were attracted by the whigs' Free Trade promises, but because he and his supporters were prepared to spend a great deal of money. Hudson and York tories did not secure their control of the city because the electors of York were especially attracted by Peelite promises, but through their economic leverage, and Hudson's promises to further the trade and commerce of the town.
FOOTNOTES:

1. e.g. N. Gash, Politics in the Age of Peel (1953); W. B. Gwyn, Democracy and the Cost of Politics in Britain (1962); W. L. Burn, "Electoral Corruption in the Nineteenth Century", Parliamentary Affairs, (1950-51) pp. 437-442.

2. P. P. XLIV (1837) Number of Electors registered in each county, city and borough in England and Wales in 1836 and 1837; also of the number of freemen in each county and borough in England and Wales on the register of 1837 as entitled to vote... p. 653.


5. P. P. XLIV (1837) Number of Freemen... p. 588, 619. At Bristol in 1836 there were 3,949 freemen registered as electors, 4,740 £10 householders and 1,303 freeholders. At Newcastle there were 1,883 freemen and 2,739 householders.


7. Yorkshireman 10 Jan. 1835. The Concept of 'Market politics', as opposed to the politics of influence or opinion was coined by T. J. Nossiter, Influence, Opinion and Political Idioms in Reformed England 1832-1874, (Hassocks, 1975), pp. 6-7.

8. Report from the select committee on the York City Election bribery petition together with the minutes of evidence and an appendix. (P. P. X (1835) pp. 281-738.


10. York Select Committee (1835) p. 463.

11. Ibid., (1835) p. 487.


16. York Select Committee (1835) p. 287.

17. Ibid., p. 286.
18. Ibid., p.287.
19. York Select Committee (1835) p.488.
21. Sir Robert Heron, Notes (Grantham, 1852 ed.) p.258
22. Yorkshire Gazette 27 June 1940.
23. Ibid.,
24. The Times, 1 July 1841.
25. Yorkshire Gazette 3 July 1841.
30. York Courant 20 Nov.1832.
32. e.g. P.D. (3rd. ser.) III 30 March 1831 cols 1171-1172; I 27 Aug. 1831 cols. 732-734.
33. York Select Committee (1835) p.455.
34. Ibid., (1835) p.182.
35. Lowther MSS. DD/LH/184. Letter addressed to 'Dear Brother' at 'Wilton Castle' by an unidentified relative of J.H. Lowther - possibly his uncle - 11 Sept.1832. Also cf. J.H. Lowther to his father, Sir J. Lowther (Bart.) n.d. Dec 1932. ("Bayntun's arrival... has involved me in some embarrassment").
36. There are several examples of such cards in a bound volume of election material in York City Library, Parliamentary Elections York 1834-1841, (Y.324.42) (non-paginated).
38. The Poll for Members in Parliament to Represent the City of York, Printed for the Election Committee of the Hon. Edward Petre (1832) p. x. Biographical notices of Bayntun are contained in Annual Register (1833); Gentleman's Magazine (1833) 'Alumni Oxoniensis'.

39. Lowther MSS. DD/LH/184 George Hudson to Sir J. Lowther (Bart.) 18 Nov. 1833.

40. Ibid., DD/LH/184 Sir J. Lowther (Bart.) to an unidentified member of Lowther's election committee 5 Oct. 1833.

41. Ibid., DD/LH/186 J. H. Lowther to his father 18 Nov. 1833; also c.f. DD/LH/184 J. H. Lowther to his father n.d. (1833).

42. Ibid., DD/LH/184 George Hudson to Sir J. Lowther (Bart.) 2 Nov. 1833; c.f. Hewley Graham and James Richardson to Sir J. Lowther 1 Oct. 1833.

43. York Herald 23 Nov. 1833.


45. York Select Committee (1835) p. 499.


47. All of these votes were publicized in an anti-Petre placard published by Thomas Wilson 10 Dec. 1834, entitled 'Mr. Petre and the Electors of the City of York'. It was also noted that he had voted only 15 times, and had been absent on 101 divisions. (c.f. Parliamentary elections York 1834-1841, (Y. 324.24).


49. York Select Committee (1835) p. 492. Hewley Graham from a tory perspective regarded them as "the virtually coalesced candidates" drawing this inference in part from their joint electoral procession to the hustings; "Barkley rode after Dundas, but in the same procession" (Lowther MSS DD/LH/186 Hewley Graham to Sir J. Lowther, (Bart.) 5 Jan. 1835).


51. Ibid., DD/LH/186 Hewley Graham to Sir J. Lowther (Bart.) 6 Jan. 1835.

52. York Select Committee (1835) p. 458. The estimate of the number of promises received by Barkley came from John Clemisha, a member of the York Society of Friends (p. 499).

53. P.D. (3rd ser.) XXIX 14 July 1835 cols. 601-602. 57 of the 63 petitioners were Dundas or Barkley supporters. The placard was reported in the Yorkshireman 6 July 1835.

55. See above p.282-283.

56. Lambton MSS. Joseph Parkes to Lord Durham 6 Sept. 1835. Also
Parkes to Durham 23 Oct. 1835.

57. c.f. Leeds Mercury (edit.) 9 Jan 1836; Annual Register (1837)
p.387. Parkes had been aware even in 1835 of the hostility that
the whig proposals were likely to create amongst freemen c.f.


60. Report of the Inquiry by the Government Commissioners into the
existing state of the corporation of York (York, 1833) (Y352)
especially pp.71-77. 'State and Prospects of the town'.

61. B.M.Ratcliffe and W.H.Chaloner (eds.), A French Sociologist looks
at Britain : Gustave d'Eichtal and British Society in 1828.
(Manchester, 1977) p.64.

62. c.f. Yorkshire Gazette 10 Jan.1835 for the candidates speeches at
their nomination.

63. Yorkshireman 5 ec.1835. Only belatedly did whigs prepare lists
of nominees for each ward acceptable to reformers (York Courant
10, 17, Dec.1835; York Herald 19,26 Dec.1835).

64. York Courant 14 pr.1836. 'the Agitator' referred to was Daniel
O'Connell. For the respective parties' comments upon the results
of the first municipal elections c.f. York Herald 2 Jan.1836,

65. c.f. Yorkshireman 4 Jan.1839 'Tory Ascendancy in the City of York'.

66. For the freemen's criticism of the whig council over this issue
c.f. Yorkshire Gazette 13 June 1835, Yorkshireman 5 Nov.1836.

67. York Courant 14 April, 8 Nov.1836; A.Stacpoole et al (eds.)

68. Atcherley Papers (York City Archives). 93/7 J.Holtby to D.F.
Atcherley 13 Nov.1837.


70. Ibid.

71. Yorkshire Gazette 15 July 1837.

72. Ibid., 2 May 1835, 9,16 April 1936.

73. Yorkshire Gazette 27 July 1839, 8 Feb.1840; Yorkshireman 30 May,
7 Nov.1840, 12 June 1841.

74. Atcherley Papers 93/8 J.Holtby to D.F.Atcherley n.d.
75. c.f. Ibid., and 93/16 William Blanchard to Atcherley n.d. This was probably a reference to Dundas's private residence in York rather than to a whig public house.

76. Ibid., 93/8 J. Holtby to Atcherley n.d.

77. Ibid.

78. York Herald 29 July 1837.


80. Atcherley Papers 93/8 J. Holtby to Atcherley n.d.

81. Ibid., 93/7 J. Holtby to Atcherley 13 Nov. 1837; 93/8 J. Holtby to Atcherley n.d.

82. c.f. Ibid., and 83/16 William Blanchard to Atcherley n.d.

83. Ibid., 93/7 J. Holtby to Atcherley 13 Nov. 1837.


86. Yorkshireman 10 Jan., 31 Jan., 28 Feb., 28 March, 25 April, 6 June 1835.


88. Yorkshireman 29 July 1837.

89. Ibid., 20 Jan. 1838, 3 Feb. 1838.

90. Ibid., 4 Jan. 1839.

91. Ibid.

92. Ibid., e.g. 6 April, 13 July 1839.

93. Ibid., 20 Oct., 2 Nov. 1839.

FOOTNOTES:


96. York Courant 15 March, 24 May 1838.

97. Yorkshireman 16 Nov.1839.


102. Yorkshireman 17 Nov.1839.

103. Ibid., 20 Oct., 16 Nov. 1839.

104. York Herald 6 July 1839; 26 June 1841.


107. York Herald 3 July 1841; York Courant 1 July 1841.


112. Parkes wrote a long and detailed memorandum to Lord John Russell in May 1841 setting out expected Whig/Liberal gains and losses (P.R.O. 30/22/4/A). This is reproduced in full in N.Gash,

113. Jaggard counted the number of references to individual issues in the candidates published election addresses and speeches, and thereby sought to refute Kemp's earlier judgement that "The elections showed that the country, like the House of Commons, was not primarily interested in the Corn Law proposal".


120. Lambton MSS (Lambton Castle, Chester-le-Street) W.H. Ord (Jun.) to Lord Durham Dec. 1834.

121. Ridley MSS (Northumberland Record Office) ZRI 25/59 Armorer Donkin to Ridley 14 June 1830.


124. Anon., Chapters in the Political History of Sheffield 1832-1849. (Sheffield, 1884) p. 18.


128. York Select Committee (1835) p. 297.

129. The Times 2 July 1841.

130. A. Aspinall, Politics and the Press c. 1780-1850 (1949) pp. 380-381. c.f. D. Hudson, Thomas Barnes of The Times (Cambridge, 1944). For an overview of the influence of The Times in the mid-


CONCLUSION

This study contributes to several of the debates as to the nature and practice of early nineteenth century politics. The political clubs and organizations of this period have been little studied, yet there were significant developments occurring at constituency level. Partisan loyalties and organizational efforts emphatically took 'party' into the provinces, as local and national rivalries and loyalties subtly coalesced. Detailed accounts of institutions such as the Newcastle Fox Club, the Northern Political Union, the York Whig Club, and the Bristol Liberal Association, allied to insights into the operations of an increasingly politicized provincial press, demonstrate the vibrancy of urban political culture at this time, and confirm many of the conclusions independently arrived at by a number of recent Hanoverian historians.¹

Increasingly, after 1832, party associations of committed and initiated enthusiasts were required to marshall and organize voters. Throughout this study emphasis has been placed upon the importance of liberal unity and organization if success was to be achieved at a local level. As two experienced solicitors commented, in an authoritative guide to electioneering later in the nineteenth century, "Organization and management will beat the strongest party that ventures to rely only upon political principle and personal zeal".²

The shrewd observations of Joseph Parkes, the leading liberal organizer and election manager in the 1830's, have been noted on several occasions in this study. He wrote to Lord John Russell in May 1841:

"Experience of 16 years active work in all classes of the Representation, and especially experience behind the Party scenes of the last two dissolutions, has convinced me - first; that the action of political principle and particular cabinet policies on the English Borough constituencies is much overrated: secondly; that the returns are much more influenced by particular local circumstances and the particular personal relations of candidates than general influenced by the sufficiency and purse weight of candidates; fourthly, that the Borough results in England generally much baffle previous calculations of both parties..." ³

This assessment may have erred on the side of cynicism, but much of the evidence from political events in Newcastle, Bristol, and York between 1812 and 1841 tends to support Parkes' conclusions.

One of the reasons that provincial political clubs have received little attention is that they generally left scanty documentation. Rarely can the historian receive private, behind the scenes, insights.
The bulk of evidence that has survived relates to the public activities of organizations which were recorded in the press or printed pamphlet form, although these sources have been supplemented, whenever possible, with letters from surviving manuscript collections. Inevitably, the scope of this study is constrained by the range of available source material. Moreover, individuals, and trends in opinion, are more easily identified when they appear within an institutional context. When one is explaining the absence of liberal impetus, or short-lived and weak associations, as was the case at Bristol before 1830, or York in the 1830's, individuals appear even less frequently in the public record. There is enough evidence available, however, to arrive at sensible and valid conclusions.

The 'liberal middle classes' has been used in this account as a convenient and shorthand label which, has embraced individuals such as James Losh, James Hodgson, Samuel Nicoll, George Leeman, Thomas Manchee and John Cunningham. Such men articulated a widespread belief in change and reform. They were a recognizable force although were only able to maintain a fragile political identity. The liberal middle classes focussed their agitation through petitions, the press, political unions, and party associations. Whig leaders such as Lord Grey eventually recognized that they would have to take notice of them, despite considerable misgivings about giving too great a credence to popular demands. The fate of the Newcastle Fox dinners was one indicator that provincial reformers were no longer prepared to be passive spectators of an unrepresentative legislature. The temporary success of organizations such as the York Whig Club similarly demonstrated an increasing self-confidence and assertiveness amongst the liberal middle classes. Bristol's reformers, for their part, lacked an aristocratic figure from whom they could take a lead, which at least partially explains their lack of direction before 1830. At York, reformers still tended to look instinctively towards aristocratic patrons such as Fitzwilliam, Milton, or the Dundas family for a lead. At Newcastle, Lord Durham and Lord Grey were local icons (an impressive monument to the latter, completed in August 1838 and paid for by public subscription, still dominates the centre of the city). Bristol lacked such a clear-cut aristocratic leader but happily latched onto the Berkeley family in the 1830's.

The agenda of the liberal middle classes generally lacked a social edge. Rarely was politics explicitly informed by socio-economic antagonisms, although 'class' regularly featured in the
language of political discourse. The astute French observer Alexis de Tocqueville noted that:

"if you speak to a member of the middle classes, you will find he hates some aristocrats, but not the aristocracy. On the contrary, he himself is full of aristocratic prejudices".

Elsewhere he noted of the English in general that,

"they seem still convinced that extreme inequality of wealth is the natural order of things... As long as the imagination of the English has not broken this fetter, and does not follow another chain of ideas, the chances of a violent revolution are few". (5)

Alliances between the liberal middle classes and the county gentry, or with the more radically inclined working classes, were occasionally possible, and were most effective during the reform crisis of 1831-32. Generally, however, such alliances tended to be short-lived and inherently unstable. "Class' objectives were by no means straightforward. York's predominantly working-class freemen electorate, for example, saw little advantage in universal suffrage and the ballot, which would have swamped their influence and curtailed the payment of polling money.

Differences between localities meant that whigs and liberals in Newcastle, Bristol, and York were competing against different opposition and needed to vary their tactics accordingly. At York, tory largesse and influence amongst the freemen was the main factor which had to be countered. When this was allied to the substantial commercial power of George Hudson in the late 1830's, it was difficult to combat. At Bristol, the corporation, the commercial establishment, the Church of England, and the economically powerful West India interests formed an impressive coalition against reformist candidates. A whig/liberal breakthrough was always going to be difficult to achieve, and even candidates of impressive national standing such as Samuel Romilly failed to accomplish the task. At Newcastle, the main threat to moderate reformers tended to come from the left. Radicals pressed the whigs to go further and faster than they were prepared to go, and splits amongst progressively inclined individuals were exemplified in the problems faced by John Fife in the 1830's.

The 1832 Reform Act acknowledged the status and respectability of the middle classes and their right to a stake in the political system. Many of the early nineteenth century demands of the liberal middle classes were fulfilled, as reforms in local government, the slave trade, the Poor Laws, and the government of the church and the
British Empire followed upon the heels of the substantial alteration in Britain's system of representation. It is usually argued that the main body of the middle classes had had enough change by the late 1830's and wished to conserve what had been achieved. Yet the increasing electoral support for the Conservatives in the 1830's, and their triumph in 1841, was more complex than J.W.Croker's explanation might suggest ("every Conservative candidate professed himself in plain words to be Sir Robert Peel's man, and on that ground was elected").

There was undoubtedly a great deal of disillusionment and discontent with Lord Melbourne's premiership, and the Whigs' lack of direction in the late 1830's, which encouraged some converts to a Conservatism freshly infused with Tamworth values. On the other hand, there was a continuing fund of liberal and progressive sentiment in the 1830's which the Whigs were either unwilling or unable to harness. Bribery at elections was not necessarily a substitute for party feeling, but it could be an influential accomplice, particularly in freemen boroughs such as York, where the natural expression of political opinion was manipulated. The Whigs responded less effectively than the Tories to the challenges of registration politics and constituency organization in the 1830's. Thanks to an inherent distrust of popular participation on the part of the aristocratic Whig leadership, organizations such as the Bristol Liberal Association were not nurtured and financed in such a way as to ensure their continued support and existence. Furthermore, as the chapter on Newcastle politics in the 1830's indicated, the progressive vote was fractured and divided. There was a disinclination on the part of some radicals to exert themselves to keep a conservative Whig administration in office, and some Chartists considered a Conservative administration preferable to a heavy handed Whig government that had transported the Tolpuddle Labourers and imposed the 'Workhouse Test'. Brent's recent study argued that a further element in the fragmentation of support for the Whigs was that they had alienated religious dissenting groups. Analysing the results of the 1841 General Election, the Eclectic Review referred to the "indifference and lethargy" of non-conformists towards the advance of Toryism and suggested that a prime cause of Whig losses had been "the apathy of the great mass of the people". Overall, for a variety of reasons, the Whigs were unable to secure the wholehearted backing of a significant section of their natural constituency.

The liberal middle classes were a section of the population that
mattered in early nineteenth century politics. They constituted the bulk of the readership of influential reform newspapers. They provided the motivating force behind many local clubs, societies, and institutions, and transferred political ideas and aspirations into even ostensibly 'non-political' aspects of public life such as religious, intellectual, and charitable institutions. Political activism, except at times of exceptional excitement, is a minority pursuit, but the liberal middle classes constituted an articulate vanguard. The same names of key individuals tend to recur upon petitions, requisitions, subscriptions, attending dinners and making speeches, at Newcastle, Bristol, and York. As a group, at any one time, they rarely exceeded two hundred individuals in each town, but were sufficiently closely knit to organize effective campaigns and gain wider support. An influential minority that was in a position to control the flow of information, established a progressive agenda in towns throughout England. The specific objectives of the liberal middle classes varied from locality to locality, as did the degree of success that they enjoyed. Nevertheless, there were also overarching aims which gave campaigns for liberal reforms a national dimension.
FOOTNOTES:


4. For details of the construction of the Grey monument c.f. M. A. Richardson, The Local Historian's Table Book... (Newcastle, 1856) IV pp. 380-382.


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P.P. (1830–31) III Report of the Select Committee appointed to examine the petitions in favour of reform presented between 5 November 1830 and 4 March 1831. pp.421–432.


P.P. (1835) X Report of the Select Committee on the York City Election Bribery petition together with the minutes of evidence and an appendix pp.281–738.
p. p. (1837) XXVI Boundary Commissioners' Report...

p. p. (1837) XLIV Number of Electors registered in each county, city, and borough in England and Wales in 1836 and 1837; also of the number of freemen in each city and borough in England and Wales on the register of 1837 as entitled to vote...

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