



Radicalism and Popular Protest in Georgian Britain, c. 1714–1832

Teaching Pack

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Radicalism and Popular Protest in Georgian Britain, c. 1714–1832

Introduction

Great Britain was transformed in the Georgian period, which began with the accession of King George I in 1714. Against a backdrop of immense social and cultural change, political radicalism was fuelled by a wave of revolutions in the Atlantic world (in Britain's American colonies, in France, and in Haiti), and new Enlightenment ideas of liberty and egalitarianism. The impact of a number of wars, particularly between Britain and France, combined with advancing industrialisation and economic development, resulted in unemployment and high taxes and prices. Many in society were left impoverished and desperate for change.

Popular politics thrived in these periods of social and economic depression and in a political climate fluctuating between war and peace. A radical press flourished within a prolific popular print culture, facilitating a dialogue between the ruling classes and the people over rights and society in Britain. Reform societies were founded in towns across the country in the 1790s, and again in the early nineteenth century. Riots, strikes, uprisings, and mass gatherings across England, Scotland, and Wales saw Britons demanding change and reform, while also defending traditional ways of life.

The sources in [*Radicalism and Popular Protest in Georgian Britain, c. 1714–1832*](#), document fundamental themes of power, rights, and representation in a time of activism, unrest, conspiracies, and acts of rebellion against the government and the monarchy. They speak to political and social reform in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain, and also to the agency of ordinary people and the contribution of all members of society to protest and calls for change.

The activities contained within this teaching pack could easily take around **45–50 minutes**, though the exact duration will depend on reading time and the breadth and depth of accompanying discussion.

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Learning Objectives

In using this teaching pack, students will:

1. **Explore** the origins and spread of popular radicalism in the Georgian period
2. **Investigate** the people, publications, and events that had such an impact.
3. **Consider** the place of radicalism and popular protest in the Georgian era in the social and cultural development of Britain.

Historical Background and Context

The radical tradition in eighteenth-century Britain was characterised by resistance to authority, discontent with the status quo, and a sense of liberty and freedom. For example, supporters of the English radical journalist and MP, John Wilkes, called for “Wilkes and Liberty” in the 1760s. Radicalism was ignited by revolutionary ideas abroad, particularly from the Thirteen Colonies in North America, and by the radical writer and political theorist, Thomas Paine, who authored pamphlets in the 1770s calling for American independence from Britain. During the 1790s, largely in response to the French Revolution, a number of English political thinkers developed a reform movement in Britain, centred on freedom of speech and parliamentary reform. Popular protest, political societies, and publications offered various ways to challenge the established order. Writers, orators, and publishers such as the satirist and bookseller, William Hone; the writer, John Thelwall; or the radical politician, John Horne Tooke, produced pamphlets and publications deemed treasonous or seditious, and many faced criminal trials. Newspapers, broadsides, poetry, songs, and ballads proliferated and demonstrate how these ideas shaped popular culture. Satirical prints and caricatures from artists such as James Gillray offer insight into the role of wit and humour in political and social life in Georgian Britain.

The radical movement successfully mobilised larger sections of society than ever before. Mass gatherings were common. At Spa Fields in London in 1816, followers of the revolutionary, Thomas Spence, called for the common ownership of land and democratic equality. In March 1817, thousands of weavers prepared to march to London from Manchester to present a petition for reform in the so-called “March of the Blanketeers”. At its most extreme, radicalism threatened to overthrow the monarchy and ruling classes: papers relating to the Cato Street conspiracy of 1820 reveal how close Britain came to revolution.

Historical Background and Context (Continued)

Agricultural disorder and disaffection were common throughout the Georgian period. National debt was exacerbated by Britain being almost constantly in a state of war; high taxation and demobilisation contributed to widespread poverty, rising prices, and food scarcity. Popular protest included localised bread and corn riots, as well as action against turnpikes, tolls, and taxes. Particularly prominent in this period were acts of rebellion against advancing mechanisation, in protest against the demise of traditional forms of industry. The Luddites, named after the fictional character of Ned Ludd, were mainly croppers, a highly skilled group of cloth finishers, who damaged new cropping machines across Nottinghamshire, Yorkshire, and Lancashire. Luddism represented a sea change in relations between the crowd and the authorities, exemplified by the Pentrich Rising, an armed uprising in Derbyshire in 1817. This was also the period of early trade unionism, giving rise to combinations of weavers and cloth workers, miners and colliers, shoe makers and many other trades, that sought to protect pay and rights.

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SOURCE ONE

Source Intro

The 1790s was a period of intense demands for change, particularly after the French Revolution began in 1789. A network of radical committees and debating clubs emerged around Britain agitating for moderate to radical reform of government and the constitution. This included universal male suffrage, democratic reform of the British parliament, and freedom of speech. What was new in these corresponding societies in London, Sheffield, Derby, Leeds, Birmingham, Nottingham, and elsewhere, was the activism of the working classes. Critics of the political establishment were marginalised or silenced. For example, the shoemaker, Thomas Hardy, a political reformer and founder of the London Corresponding Society (LCS), was arrested and tried for high treason in 1794.

Source

“Address and Declaration” [of the London Corresponding Society], c. 1792.

The National Archives (hereafter TNA), UK, TS 11/951/3495.

[Images 226–227.](#)

ADDRESS and DECLARATION.
At a select meeting of the friends of universal peace and liberty, the following address and declaration to our fellow-citizens was agreed on, and ordered to be published.

Friends and Fellow-citizens

At a moment like the present, when wilful misrepresentation: tions are industriously spread by the ~~partisans~~ ^{partisans} of arbitrary power and the advocates of passive obedience and court-government; WE think it incumbent upon us to declare to the world our principles and the motives of our conduct.

We rejoice at the glorious event of the French Revolution.

If it be asked — What is the French Revolution to us? We answer (as has been already answered in another place*) It is much. — Much to us as Men: Much to us as Englishmen.

As Men, We rejoice in the freedom of twenty-five millions of our fellow-men. We rejoice in the prospect which such a magnificent example opens to the world. We congratulate the French nation for having laid the axe to the root of tyranny, and for erecting government on the sacred HEREDITARY rights of MAN. — Rights which appertain to ALL, and not to any one more than to another. — We know of no human authority superior to that of a whole nation: and we profess and proclaim it as our principle; that every nation has, at all times, an inherent, inalienable right to constitute and establish such government for itself as best accords with its disposition, interest and happiness.

As Englishmen we also rejoice, because we are immediately interested in the French revolution.

Without enquiring into the justice, on either side, of the reproachful charges of intrigue and ambition which the English and French courts have constantly made on each other. We confine ourselves to this observation: — That if the court of France only was in fault, and the numerous wars which have destroyed both countries

* Declaration of the Volunteers of Belfast

are chargeable to her alone; that Court now exists no longer; and the cause and the consequence must cease together. — The French therefore by the revolution they have made, have conquered for US as well as for themselves; if it be true, that their court only was in fault, and ours never.

On this state of the case the French revolution concerns us immediately. We are oppressed with a heavy national debt, a burthen of taxes, and an oppressive administration of government; beyond those of any people in the world. We have also a very numerous Poor: and we hold, that the moral obligation of providing for Old age, helpless infancy, and poverty, is far superior to that of supplying the invented wants of courtly extravagance, ambition and intrigue.

We believe there is no instance to be produced, but in England, of seven millions of Inhabitants, which make but little more than one million of families, paying yearly SEVENTEEN MILLIONS of taxes. As it has always been held out by all administrations, that the restless ambition of the Court of France rendered this expense necessary to us for our own defence; we consequently rejoice as men deeply interested in the French revolution: for that Court, as we have already said, exists no longer, and consequently the same enormous expenses need not continue to us.

Thus rejoicing, as we sincerely do, both as Men and Englishmen, as lovers of universal peace and freedom, and as friends to our own national prosperity and a reduction of our public expenses; We cannot but express our astonishment, that any part, or any member of our own government, should reprobate the extinction of that very Power in France, or wish to see it restored, to whose influence they formerly attributed (whilst they appeared to lament) the enormous increase of our own burthens and taxes. — What then, are they sorry that the pretence for new oppressive taxes, and the occasion for continuing many old taxes, will be at an end? — If so, And if it is the policy of Courts and Court-government to prefer enemies to friends, and a system of war to that of peace, as affording more pretences for Places, Offices, Pensions, Revenue and Taxation; It is high time for the people of every nation to look with circumspection to their own interests.

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Questions for Discussion

1. How did the French Revolution influence radical thinking in Britain? Why was it such a “magnificent example” to reformers?
2. What do the authors identify as the main inadequacies of the British government? Why was reform so desperately needed in their eyes?
3. What were regarded as the “sacred hereditary rights of man”?

SOURCE TWO

Source Intro

There was mass discontent in 1819 during a period of economic slump, widespread wage cuts, and unemployment. A peaceful rally of 60,000 people organised at St Peter's Field in Manchester in August 1819 was the climax of a national series of mass meetings in support of parliamentary reform and universal suffrage. Organised by Manchester radicals, including the reformer, Samuel Bamford, the crowd were to be addressed by the radical speaker, Henry Hunt, known as the "Orator" for his rousing speeches. Local magistrates sent in the Manchester Yeomanry to arrest Hunt and clear the field. Eighteen people died and hundreds were injured when the cavalry charged the peaceful crowd. Reformers named it "Peterloo", comparing the violence to the battle of Waterloo in 1815.

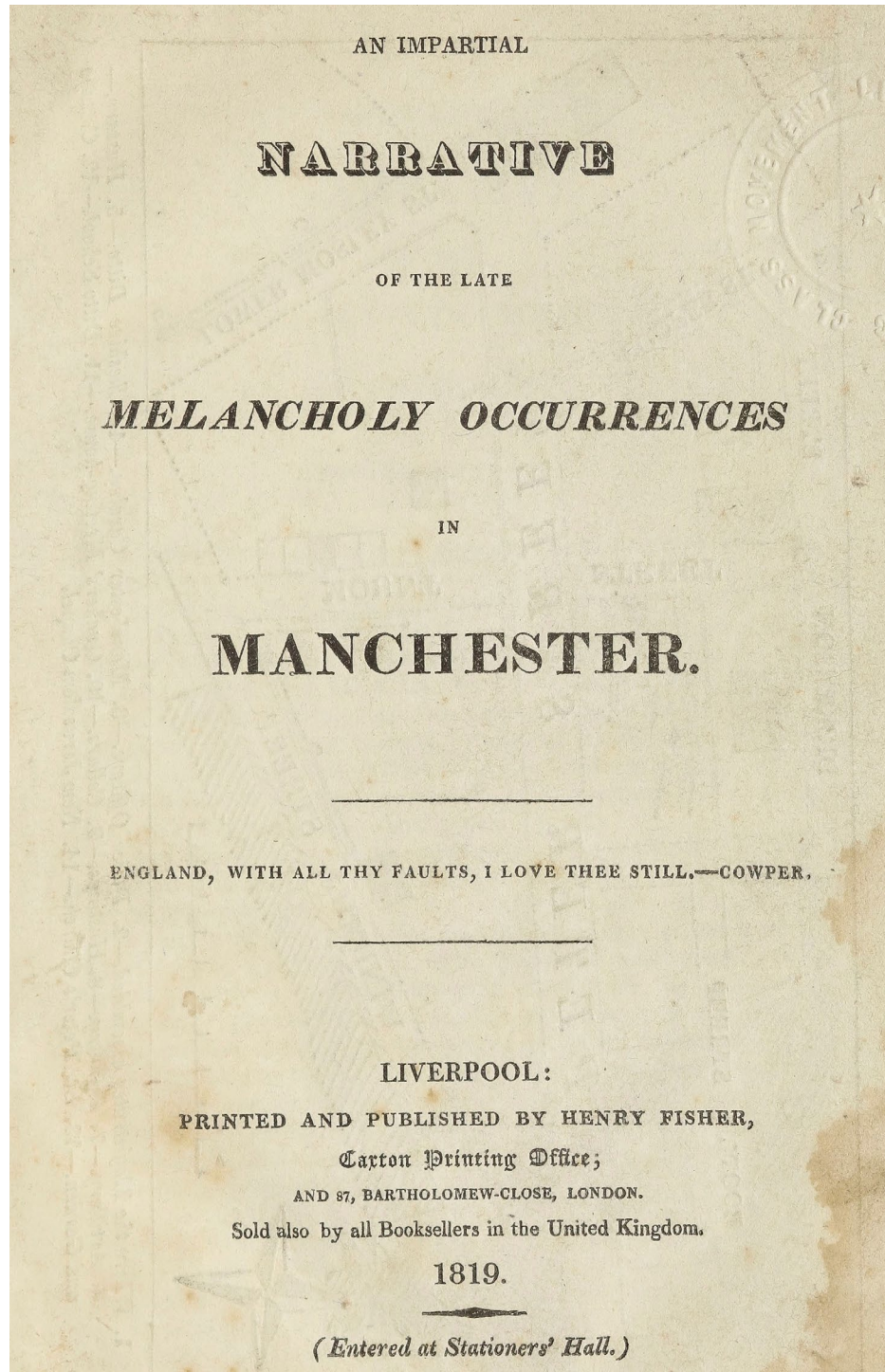
Lancashire was a hotbed of radical politics in this period, including some of the earliest recorded independent female political activity in Britain. The Manchester Female Reform Society was formed in July 1819, with the aim of spreading democratic ideals among women. Their president was Mary Fildes, who stood on the speakers' platform at St Peter's Field. The society's secretary, Susanna Saxton, wrote the following address shortly after the event.

Source

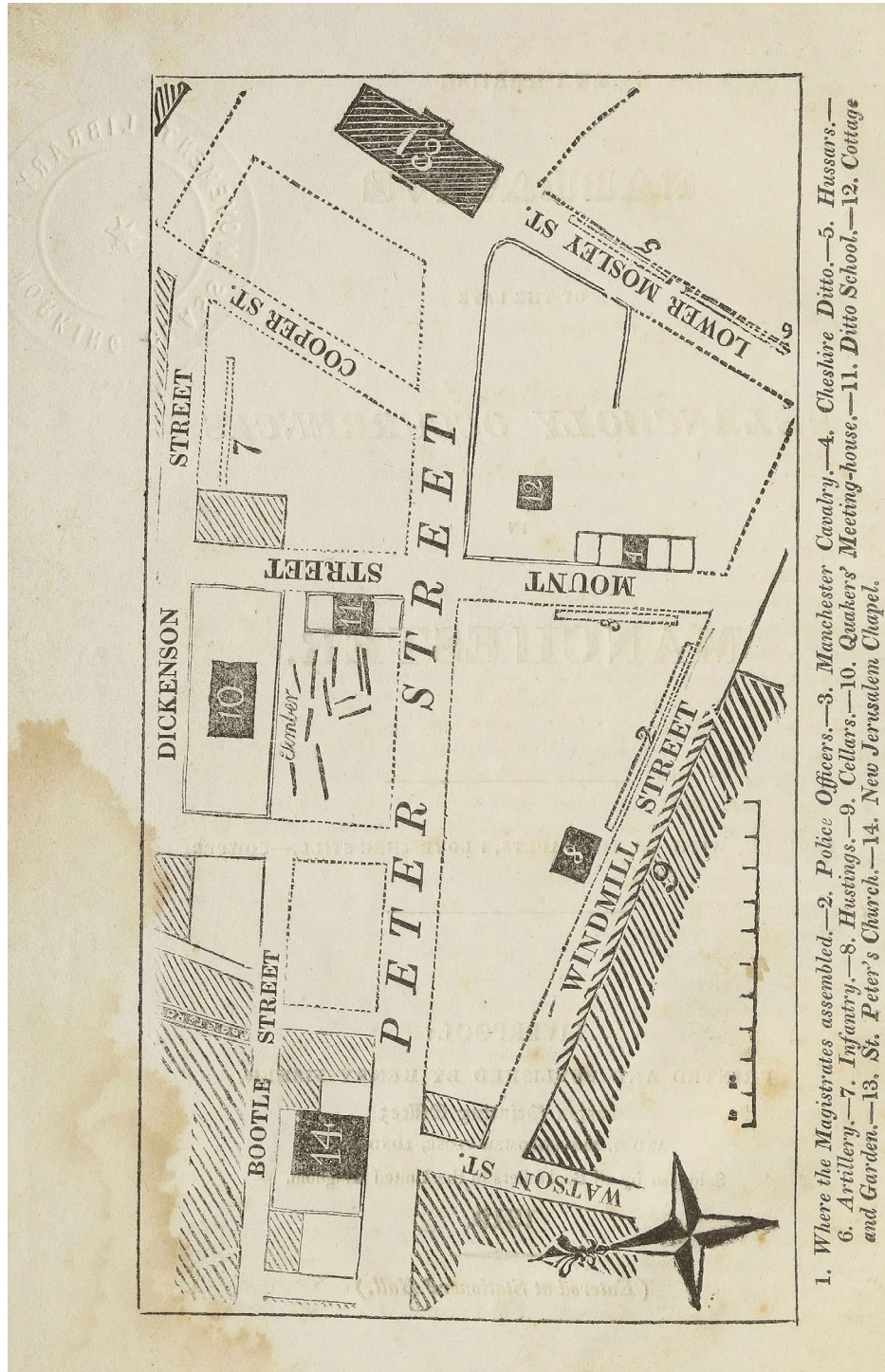
Susanna Saxton, "The Manchester Female Reformers' Address", in *An Impartial Narrative of the Late Melancholy Occurrences in Manchester* (Liverpool, 1819).

Working Class Movement Library, D54.

[Images 1–2 and 8–11.](#)



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“ On the same day, after the Meeting, there will be a PUBLIC DINNER, at the *Union School Rooms, George Leigh-street*.— Dinner on the Table at 5 o'clock.

“ Tickets, 10s. 6d. each, including all expences, may be had at Mr. WROE'S, Bookseller, Market-street.”

Prior to the publication of the preceding advertisement, the peculiar deadness of trade, which had for some time prevailed in the manufacturing districts, particularly in Manchester and its vicinity, had involved numerous families in the deepest distress. The pressure of these severities was felt with the most acute sensibility; and as all can feel, though few only are capable of tracing existing evils to their legitimate source, the opinion became general, that nearly the whole might be ascribed to the defective representation of the country; and consequently, that if a radical reform in this branch of the legislature could be effected, the suffering people would find, in the accomplishment of this object, a mitigation of their woes, if not a complete redress of all their grievances.

Actuated by this principle, and animated with these hopes, numerous women of Manchester formed themselves into a society of FEMALE REFORMERS, to aid the common cause in which the men were engaged. Pleased with the prospects of success which awaited their united endeavours, they appointed a committee to transact their business; and as their complicated sufferings were calculated to make a forcible appeal to the feelings of humanity, and to awaken a powerful sympathy in the bosoms of others, on July the 20th, 1819, they wrote the following address, which was also published in the MANCHESTER OBSERVER for July 31st, 1819.

THE MANCHESTER FEMALE REFORMERS' ADDRESS
TO THE

*Wives, Mothers, Sisters, and Daughters of the higher and middling
Classes of Society.*

“ DEAR SISTERS OF THE EARTH,

“ IT is with a spirit of peaceful consideration and due respect that we are induced to address you, upon the causes that have compelled us to associate together in aid of our suffering children, our dying parents, and the miserable partners of our woes. Bereft, not only of that support, the calls of nature require for existence; but the balm of sweet repose hath long been a stranger to us. Our minds are filled with horror and despair, fearful, on each returning morn, the light of heaven should present to us the corpse of some of our famished offspring, or nearest kindred, which the more kind hand of death had released from the grasp of the oppressor. The Sabbath, which is set apart by the all-wise Creator for a day of rest, we are compelled to employ in repairing the tattered garments, to cover the nakedness of our forlorn and destitute families. Every succeeding night brings with it new

OCCURRENCES IN MANCHESTER.

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terrors, so that we are sick of life, and weary of a world, where poverty, wretchedness, tyranny, and injustice, have so long been permitted to reign amongst men.

“ Dear Sisters,—We feel justified in stating, that under the oppressive system of Government that we now live, the same fate that hath overtaken us, must speedily be the lot of many of you ; for it is said in the word of God, “ Where the carcase is, there will the eagles be also ;”—and this we have proved to demonstration, that the lazy Boroughmongering Eagles of destruction have nearly picked bare the bones of those who labour.—You may then fairly anticipate, that when we are mixed with the silent dust, you will become the next victims of the voracious Borough Tyrants, who will chase you, in your turn, to misery and death, till at length, the middle and useful class of society, is swept, by their relentless hands, from the face of the creation.

“ From very mature and deliberate consideration, we are thoroughly convinced, that under the present system, the day is near at hand, when nothing will be found in our unhappy country but luxury, idleness, dissipation, and tyranny, on the one hand ; and abject poverty, slavery, wretchedness, misery, and death, on the other. To avert these dreaded evils, it is your duty therefore to unite with us as speedily as possible ; and to exert your influence with your fathers, your husbands, your sons, your relatives, and your friends, to join the Male Union for constitutionally demanding a Reform in their own House, viz. The Commons’ House of Parliament ; for we are now thoroughly convinced, that for want of such timely Reform, the useful class of society has been reduced to its present degraded state—and that with such a reform, the English nation would not have been stamped with the indelible disgrace, of having been engaged in the late unjust, unnecessary, and destructive war, against the liberties of France, that closed its dreadful career on the crimson plains of Waterloo ; where the blood of our fellow-creatures flowed in such mighty profusion, that the fertile earth seemed to blush at the outrage offered to the choicest works of heaven ; and for a space of time was glutted with the polluted draught, till the Almighty, with a frown upon the aggressors, drew a veil over the dismal scene !!!

“ Let us now ask the cause of this dreadful carnage ? Was it to gain immortal happiness for all mankind ? or, if possible, “ was it for a nobler purpose ?” Alas, no ! the simple story is this, that all this dreadful slaughter was, in cool blood, committed for the purpose of placing upon the Throne of France, contrary to the people’s interest and inclination, the present contemptible Louis, a man who had been living for years in this country in idleness, and wandering from one corner of the island to the other in cowardly and vagabond slothfulness and contempt.—Let it be remembered at the same time, that this war, to reinstate this man, has tended to raise landed property threefold above its value, and to load our beloved country with such an insurmountable burden of Taxation,

that is too intolerable to endure longer; it has nearly annihilated our once flourishing trade and commerce, and is now driving our merchants and manufacturers to poverty and degradation.

“We call upon you therefore to join us with heart and hand, to exterminate tyranny and foul oppression from the face of our native country. It affords us pleasure to inform you, that numbers of your ranks have voluntarily mixed with us, who are fully determined, in defiance of the threats of the Boroughmongers, to aid us in our just and constitutional career. Our enemies are resolved upon destroying the last vestige of the natural Rights of Man, and we are determined to establish it; for as well might they attempt to arrest the sun in the region of space, or stop the diurnal motion of the earth, as to impede the rapid progress of the enlightened friends to Liberty and Truth. The beam of angelic light that hath gone forth through the globe hath at length reached unto Man, and we are proud to say that the Female Reformers of Manchester have also caught its benign and heavenly influence; it is not possible therefore for us to submit to bear the ponderous weight of our chains any longer, but to use our endeavour to tear them asunder, and dash them in the face of our remorseless oppressors.

“We can no longer bear to see numbers of our parents immured in workhouses—our fathers separated from our mothers, in direct contradiction to the laws of God and the laws of man; our sons degraded below human nature, our husbands and little ones clothed in rags, and pining on the face of the earth!—Dear Sisters, how could you bear to see the infant at the breast, drawing from you the remnant of your last blood, instead of the nourishment which nature requires; the only subsistence for yourselves being a draught of cold water? It would be criminal in us to disguise any longer the dreadful truth; for, in the midst of all these privations, if we were to hold our peace, the very trees of the forest, and stones of the valley, would justly cry out!!!

“These are a few of the consequences resulting from the mad career of the Boroughmongers’ war, to say nothing of the thousands and tens of thousands that have been slain!—the widows and orphans that have been left destitute and unprotected. The hypocritical hireling will blasphemously tell you that these things are of divine ordinance; but in vain does he publish this to reason and common sense—the great Author of nature makes no distinction of persons—the rich and the poor are all alike to him; and surely the forked lightning, the awful thunder, the terrible earthquakes, and the howling and flaming volcanoes, are sufficient to chastise the most obdurate, without man becoming the oppressor of man. We close the disgusting scene; for language would infinitely fall short in painting the portrait of our woes in all their horrible deformities.

“In conclusion, we earnestly entreat you to come forward—posterity will bless the names they see enrolled under the banners of

Reform. Remember, that all good men were reformers in every age of the world. Noah was a reformer; he warned the people of their danger, but they paid no attention to him;—Lot did in like manner, but the deluded people laughed him to scorn; the consequence was they were destroyed;—all the Prophets were Reformers, and also the Apostles;—so was the great Founder of Christianity, he was the greatest reformer of all; and if Jesus Christ himself were to come upon the earth again, and to preach against the Church and the State in the same manner he did against the Jewish and heathen nations, his life would assuredly be sacrificed by the relentless hand of the Borough-Judases; for corruption, tyranny, and injustice, have reached their summit; and the bitter cup of oppression is now full to the brim.

“ By Order of the Committee,

“ SUSANNA SAXTON, SECRETARY.

“ *Union Rooms, Manchester, July 20, 1819.*”

“ N. B. The Committee will sit every Tuesday Evening, from six to nine o'clock, for the purpose of enrolling the Names of such Members, and transacting other Business relative to the Establishment.”

The compiler of this narrative has not introduced this address, for the purpose of making it the basis of any peculiar animadversions. It is simply given as a document, which is at once novel in its nature, and spirited in its execution. It stands as an indisputable evidence of the general feeling which prevailed; and posterity will regard it as having had no inconsiderable influence in collecting the vast concourse of people which afterwards assembled.

It was said in the advertisement which announced the public meeting for August the 9th, that “ the Boroughreeve, Magistrates, and Constables, are requested to attend.” This, however, instead of engaging their presence, soon produced a contrary effect. Scarcely had this advertisement made its appearance, before the Magistrates met to examine its import, and calculate upon its tendency. And conceiving one part to be contrary to established usage, and hostile to law, they issued a protest, of which the following is a literal copy;

“ NEW BAILEY COURT-HOUSE.

“ *Saturday, July 31, 1819.*

“ WHEREAS it appears by an advertisement in the “ *Manchester Observer*,” paper of this day, that a public and ILLEGAL MEETING is convened for *Monday, the 9th day of August next*, to be held on the AREA, NEAR ST. PETER'S CHURCH, in Man-

Radicalism and Popular Protest in Georgian Britain, c. 1714–1832

Questions for Discussion

1. What were the main grievances of the organisers of the St Peter's Field protest?
2. What reasons would the authorities have to respond to a peaceful protest in such a manner?
3. Why do you think Peterloo is referred to as a turning point in the struggle for rights and representation in Britain?

SOURCE THREE

Source Intro

The “Swing” riots were widespread uprisings by agricultural workers in southern and eastern England. They protested against mechanisation, particularly the introduction of threshing machines. Traditionally, threshing was labour-intensive work undertaken at the end of each harvest to separate grain from stalks of corn. The new machines increased efficiency but put large numbers of labourers out of work. This, combined with a decline in the prices of agricultural produce and wages, plus poor harvests in 1829 and 1830, led to deepening poverty and hunger. Protests and disturbances in the countryside under the name “Captain Swing” included acts of arson, machine breaking, and sending threatening letters. Correspondence compiled by the Home Office details individual cases of unrest. It also contains impounded pamphlets and other papers, such as source A, a public notice that warned against machine-breaking. A number of “Swing” protesters were executed; hundreds were transported to Australia or imprisoned.

Sources

A: “A Friendly Caution to the Labourers of Kent”, 1830–1831.

TNA, HO 44/23/87.

[Image 3.](#)

B: Handbill giving a “Description of two men . . . ”.

TNA, HO 52/6/190, f. 408.

[Image 812.](#)

C: A letter from Charles Sandys, clerk to the magistrates of Canterbury, 22 September, 1830.

TNA, HO 52/8/125, f. 271–272.

[Images 526–527.](#)

**A FRIENDLY
CAUTION
TO THE
LABOURERS of KENT.**

Fellow Countrymen,

Still almost daily we hear of *Breaking Machines*, and *Burning Stacks of Corn, Barns, &c.* Some of you are led to join in these things by persons who are unknown to you; these persons pretend to be your Friends; they only urge you on, they would have you believe, as a means of obtaining increase of Wages and Employ. Be no longer deceived, the day will come when some unexpected intervention of Providence, or the activity of Man, will unmask these wretches, when their dark designs will be discovered to have been, to create Confusion and Disorder, in the hope of benefitting *themselves* by Plunder, or by overturning the established Order of Things, and you will find too late, that you have been the Dupes of their designs. If they, through your means ruin the Farmer, it is perfectly clear he cannot employ you, and if you are apprehended for a Breach of the Law, you will be left to suffer, and your leaders will have Cunning enough to keep their own Necks out of the Halter. Now as you cannot be acquainted with the length to which the Arm of the Law can reach you, my friendly object is to open your Eyes, that you may no longer be ignorant of the risk you run. Learn then, that the Law says it is a crime even if a man CONCEAL what he knows in these matters, although he never consented to the commission of the Crime, and that he can only save himself from the consequences, by discovering the Offence to a Magistrate, with all the speed he can. -- Further the Law says, if a Man, though not present when the Crime is committed, is discovered to have procured, counselled (that is advised,) commanded, or abetted, (that is encouraged, or backed another to commit it,) he is an Accessory before the fact, and equally liable to Punishment. So again if several Persons set out together, or in small Parties, upon one common Design for any Purpose in itself unlawful, and each takes his part: some to commit the Crime, others to watch at proper Distances, and Stations to prevent surprise, or to favor the escape of those who are more immediately engaged in it, they are *all* (in the Eye of the Law) punishable for it. Follow then the example of those Fellow-Labourers, who have respectfully applied to their Employers for increase of Wages, where they have been too low, and who have obtained Redress. There can be no doubt but those Farmers who have hitherto paid you too little, will now see their Error, and be induced by public Opinion, to follow the Example of those Farmers who pay you what is just for your Labour. Follow this advice, given by a Stranger to you, who has only your, and His Country's Interest at Heart, (he is no Farmer) turn your backs upon your Enemies and Deceivers, pursue your Honest Industry, and become once more worthy of being respected as MEN OF KENT.

The Poor Man's Friend.

FARMERS,

To such among you as pay inadequate Wages, I say, read attentively the above Advice and Caution given to your Men, and remember that "The Labourer is worthy of his Hire." I do not call upon you to listen to wild and unreasonable Demands, but I recommend you at least to follow the example of those Farmers, who deal JUSTLY by their Labourers. Employ THEM instead of using Machines. This will it may be hoped make them contented and comfortable, and bring them back to a sense of their Duty.

HAYWARD, PRINTER, AND BOOKBINDER, DEAL.

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**DESCRIPTION of TWO MEN
detected in the act of SETTING
FIRE to a STACK of OATS
in the Parish of PAMPISFORD,
in the County of Cambridge, about
Eight o'clock in the evening of
MONDAY the 6th of *December*,
1830.**

One a tall Man, about 5 feet 10 in. high, sandy whiskers, large red nose, apparently between 50 and 60 years of age. Wore at the time a snuff-colored straight coat, light-colored pantaloons, and low shoes.

The other Man was apparently about 5 feet 4 inches, and between 30 and 40 years of age; had large black full whiskers, extending under the chin. He wore a blue straight coat, light colored breeches, and boots with cloth overall-tops.

Both the Men were seen at Pampisford at half-past twelve at noon on Monday, coming from Babraham, and probably from the New-market road.

HODSON, PRINTER, CAMBRIDGE.



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Canterbury 22^d Sept^r 1830.

Sir,

I am directed by the Magistrates of the County of Kent residing near Canterbury to state to you that the destruction of Thrashing Machines has been carried on to a most alarming extent in this part of the County -

These Offences appear to have been committed at midnight by a desperate Gang amounting to upwards of 200. persons -

The Magistrates are using every exertion to discover the Offenders But owing to intimidation they find great difficulty in procuring any evidence on which they can proceed against the parties -

A General Meeting of County Magistrates -



acting in East Kent will be held at Canterbury
on Saturday next, when they will be happy to
receive any communication or advice which
you may think proper to offer them.

I have the Honor to be
Sir
Your most Humble Servant
Charles Sandys.
Clerk to the Magistrates.

The Right Honorable
The Secretary of State
Home Department

Radicalism and Popular Protest in Georgian Britain, c. 1714–1832

Questions for Discussion

1. Do you think small scale local protest was as effective as nationwide efforts?
2. What do these documents tell us about relationships between “agitators” and the authorities in this period?
3. Would you agree with the statement that most “Swing” activity was not overtly political but was actually about a defence of traditional rights of the past?

Radicalism and Popular Protest in Georgian Britain, c. 1714–1832

Questions for General Discussion

The following questions are designed to prompt a wider discussion on the events, issues, and themes highlighted in the sources.

1. In what ways were ordinary people oppressed in the Georgian era?
2. Was social unrest inevitable? What do the documents in this teaching pack reveal about the social conditions in Britain in the Georgian period that led to protests?
3. How successful was radicalism in this period? Why was it considered so dangerous?
4. To what extent were economic factors the main cause of popular protest in Britain?
5. Discuss the long-term impact of events and movements, such as the Peterloo massacre or Luddism. Are there similarities to popular protests in modern day society?

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Related Collections:

BOA's primary source collections are organised thematically so as to enhance user experience and boost discoverability. Via reflection on our archival holdings, and in dialogue with scholars, we have grouped our collections under eleven key historical themes.

[*Radicalism and Popular Protest in Georgian Britain, c. 1714–1832*](#), falls under the broad themes of “[Politics and Social Movements](#)”, “[Culture and Society](#)”, and “[Media and Communications](#)”.

You can explore related collections, such as [*Trade Unionism and the Chartist Movement, 1833–1910*](#), and [*British Women Trade Unionists on Strike at Bryant & May, 1888*](#), by scanning the QR code.



The Collection Development Process and its Benefits

At British Online Archives (BOA), our skilled team takes great care in curating and publishing our primary source collections. It is a process that yields high-quality products, as well as **substantial benefits for all involved: BOA, our archival partners, and, ultimately, our users.** Here is a brief outline of the key steps.

Based on a proposal from a member of BOA's content team (all of whom have a background in historical scholarship), **we collaborate with staff at the relevant archives, libraries, and heritage institutions**, as well as with external academics and heritage experts, to shape the collection and produce a full item listing. The next step is equally important: **the comprehensive conservation of the physical documents.** Typically, this is carried out by professional conservators at the archives themselves, but it is funded by BOA. This crucial process **ensures that the documents remain in excellent condition for use by other researchers for years to come.**

Following conservation, the documents are digitised to the highest standards, either by BOA's expert digitisation team, the archives' in-house digitisers, or by a specialist contractor. In every case, **the digitisation costs are borne directly by BOA.** Scans are then reviewed, organised, tagged, and marketed by BOA's relevant specialist teams, a process that is **verified by collection-specific editorial boards composed of scholars and heritage experts.** They likewise contribute key supplementary materials, such as contextual essays, which complement articles produced by members of our team, as well as our innovative **source-based teaching packs.**

Prior to publication, each document undergoes **Optical Character Recognition (OCR)**, meaning that you can search for words or phrases contained within images. Our published collections **employ the [Universal Viewer \(UV\)](#).** Significantly, this offers the **"deep zoom" feature**, allowing users to examine details in a document without lowering the quality of the image. Collections that contain handwritten script also benefit from **Handwritten Text Recognition (HTR)** software. This delivers a significant increase in usability and search term accuracy.

Finally, we should highlight that the digitised images that each institution has contributed to the curation process **are made available to them for free and in perpetuity**, ensuring that they have a high-quality digital copy of the material to use as they see fit. Our archival partners likewise **receive royalties from any sales that we make**, providing a revenue stream that is welcomed, particularly by smaller archives, libraries, and heritage institutions.

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