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UNIVERSITY OF KENT

Submission for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

THE REPUTATIONS OF SIR FRANCIS BURDETT



Sir Francis Burdett by Sir Thomas Lawrence, c. 1793 (NPG 3820)

Victoria Arnold
April 2010



THE REPUTATIONS OF SIR FRANCIS BURDETT

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Abbreviations

Bamford, <i>Passages</i>	Bamford, S., <i>Passages in the Life of a Radical</i> , 1842 (Oxford, 1984)
<i>Bentham's Correspondence</i>	Sprigge, T. L. S., et al (eds.), <i>The Correspondence of Jeremy Bentham</i> (6 Vols., London, 1968-2000)
BL	British Library
BMS	British Museum Satires
Bod.	Bodleian Library
Bolingbroke, <i>Works 1</i>	Bolingbroke, H. St John, <i>The Miscellaneous Works of the Right Honourable Henry St. John, Lord Viscount Bolingbroke</i> (4 Vols., London, 1768)
Bolingbroke, <i>Works 2</i>	Goldsmith, O. (ed.), <i>The Works of the Late Right Honourable Henry St. John, Lord Viscount Bolingbroke with the Life of Lord Bolingbroke</i> (8 Vols., London, 1809)
<i>Broughton's Recollections</i>	Dorchester, Lady (ed.), <i>Recollections of a Long Life by Lord Broughton</i> (6 Vols., London, 1909-11)
<i>Burdett to his constituents</i> , 1810	Burdett, F., <i>Sir Francis Burdett to his constituents denying the power of the House of Commons to imprison the people of England</i> (London, 1810)
Cartwright, <i>Life</i>	Cartwright, F. D. (ed.), <i>The Life and Correspondence of Major Cartwright</i> (2 Vols., London, 1826)
CPD	<i>Cobbett's Parliamentary Debates</i>
<i>Cloncurry's Recollections</i>	Lawless, V. B., Baron Cloncurry, <i>Personal recollections from the life and times, with extracts from the correspondence of Valentine, Lord Cloncurry</i> (Dublin, 1849)
EHR	<i>English Historical Review</i>
<i>Farington Diary</i>	Garlick, K. et al (eds.), <i>The Diary of Joseph Farington</i> (16 Vols., New Haven, 1978-84)
HJ	<i>Historical Journal</i>
JBS	<i>Journal of British Studies</i>
JHI	<i>Journal of the History of Ideas</i>
<i>Journal of Bagshaw Stevens</i>	Galbraith, G. (ed.), <i>The Journal of the Rev. William Bagshaw Stevens</i> (Oxford, 1965)
Huish, <i>Hunt</i>	Huish, R., <i>The History of the Private and Political Life of the Late Henry Hunt, Esq. M.P. for Preston, His Times and Contemporaries; Exhibiting the Rise and Progress of Those Great Political Events which led to the Passing of the Reform Act: Embracing also the History of the Momentous Crisis, by which the Tory Government of the Country has been abolished,</i>

- Huish, *Cobbett* (2 Vols., London, 1836)
 Huish, R., *Memoirs of the late William Cobbett, Esq. MP for Oldham; embracing all the interesting events of his memorable life, obtained from private and confidential sources; also, a critical analysis of his scientific and elementary writings* (2 Vols., London, 1836).
- Hunt, *Memoirs* Hunt, H., *Memoirs of Henry Hunt, Esq. Written by himself in His Majesty's Jail at Ilchester in the County of Somerset* (3 Vols., London, 1822)
- Memoirs of Horne Tooke* Stephens, A. (ed.), *Memoirs of John Horne Tooke* (2 Vols., London, 1813)
- Memoirs of the Life of Burdett* *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Francis Burdett, Bart., Private and Political, from his infancy to the present time including his many endeavours for a reform in Parliament, our prisons, and restoring to our country its ancient Constitution with the proceedings of the House of Commons for his committal to the Tower, the manner of his being conveyed there, and a correct account of the persons who were killed and wounded by the soldiers on their return and every interesting circumstance that has transpired since his confinement* (London, 1810)
- Middlesex Election 1804* *A Full Account of the Proceedings at the Middlesex Election 1804* (London, 1804)
- NI National Archives of Ireland
- NPG National Portrait Gallery
- O'Connor, *Memoirs* O'Connor, A., *Memoirs, O'Connor Papers, Chateau le Bignon, France*
- O'Connell, *Correspondence* O'Connell, M. R. (ed.), *The Correspondence of Daniel O'Connell* (8 Vols., Dublin, 1972-80)
- Patterson, *Burdett* Patterson, M. W., *Sir Francis Burdett and His Times (1770-1844). Including Hitherto Unpublished Letters of Mrs. Fitzherbert, George Prince of Wales, the Duke of York, the Duke of Clarence (William IV), Georgiana Duchess of Devonshire, the Duke of Wellington, Lord Chancellor Erskine, Lord Chancellor Brougham, Lord Grey (of the Reform Bill), Lord Anglesey, B. Disraeli (Lord Beaconsfield), Jeremy Bentham, Thomas Coutts, Harriot Duchess of St. Albans, Lord Holland, Lady Holland, J. C. Hobhouse (Lord Broughton), Lord Cochrane (10th Earl Dundonald), the 4th Duke of Northumberland, Lord Langdale, Sir C. Manners Sutton (Lord Canterbury), Adelaide d'Orleans, Francis Place, Samuel Rogers, J. W. Croker, R. B. Haydon, and others* (2 Vols.,

- Patriot King* London, 1831)
 Bolingbroke, H. St John, *The Idea of a Patriot King*, 1749
- Parliamentary Reform, 1809* *Parliamentary Reform. A Full and Accurate Report of the Proceedings of the Meeting held at the Crown and Anchor Tavern, on Monday, the 1st of May, 1809, Relative to a Reform in the Commons House of Parliament. Sir Francis Burdett, Bart., in the Chair* (London, 1809)
- PD *The Parliamentary Debates From the Year 1803 to the Present Time: forming a continuation of the work entitled "The Parliamentary History of England from the Earliest Period to the Year 1803"*
- P&P *Past and Present*
- PR *The Parliamentary Register of History of the Proceedings and Debates of the Houses of Lords and Commons*
- State Trials* Macdonnell, J. (ed.), *Reports of State Trials, Volume I: 1820 to 1823* (London, 1888)
- TNA The National Archives, Kew
- Westminster Election 1819* *An Authentic Narrative of the Events of the Westminster Election, which commenced on Saturday, February 13th, and closed on Wednesday, March 3d, 1819; including the Speeches of the Candidates, Sir Francis Burdett and Others. Together with the Report of the Westminster Reformers. Compiled by order of the Committee appointed to manage the Election of Mr. Hobhouse* (London, 1819)

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My thanks also goes to the staff at the various archives and libraries I have used when writing this thesis – the British Library, the Bodleian Library; Cambridge University Library; Durham University Library; the Templeman Library; Canterbury Cathedral Library; the Institute of Historical Research; the National Archives at Kew; the National Archives of Ireland; the Bedford and Luton Archive Services; the Derbyshire Record Office; the Doncaster Archives Department; the East Riding of Yorkshire Archives and Record Service; the Hampshire Record Office; the Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland Record Office; the Liverpool Record Office; the Manchester University Labour History Archive and Study Centre; the Northumberland Record Office; the North Yorkshire County Record Office; the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Archive Service, Staffordshire Record Office; and the Wiltshire and Swindon Record Office.

Last, but by no means least, I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor Professor Grayson Ditchfield for his wise counsel, inspiration, guidance and constant reassurance. Thank you for your patience, understanding and, most of all, your faith in my work.

THE REPUTATIONS OF SIR FRANCIS BURDETT

Introduction

Sir Francis Burdett was one of the most well-known, popular and controversial figures of his day. He played an instrumental and significant role in the development of the parliamentary reform movement and also in several other liberal campaigns of the period, notably Catholic Emancipation and humanitarian measures such as prison reform and the abolition of flogging in the army. His role both as a wealthy gentleman and a parliamentarian ensured that, unlike many of his radical allies, Burdett had a means by which to voice his views and was less vulnerable to, though far from entirely immune from, prosecution for expressing them. This ensured that he was a central figure in the survival and direction of reform movements. Burdett's parliamentary speeches and public addresses were published as pamphlets and frequently reported in the press. He was the subject of a large number of satirical prints and also the recipient of hundreds of letters from aggrieved members of the public seeking redress, or from politicians seeking his advice and/or co-operation. Consequently, there is a large quantity of both printed literature and manuscript sources relating to Burdett, much of which has yet to be fully explored. He aroused strong, and often extreme, feelings amongst his contemporaries, from passionate devotion to intense hatred. Yet, despite Burdett's importance, his notoriety, and the abundance of sources relating to him, there has been surprisingly little study of his life, career, and historical reputations.

I

Burdett was born on 25 January 1770 in Foremark, Derbyshire. He was the first surviving son of Francis Burdett (1743-1794), a country gentleman, and Eleanor Jones, daughter of Sir William Jones of Ramsbury Manor, Wiltshire. The Burdetts were a wealthy family who had lived at Foremark since the Norman Conquest. Burdett was educated at Westminster School between 1778 and 1786, and then at Christ Church, Oxford for two years, but, like many men of his type, he did not

graduate. In 1793 he married Sophia Coutts, daughter of Thomas Coutts (1735-1822), a wealthy London banker. Together they had six children, one son, Robert, and five daughters, Sophia, Susannah, Joanna, Clara and Angela. It was also rumoured that Burdett fathered two other children through an affair with Jane Elizabeth Harley, Lady Oxford. Burdett became the fifth baronet in February 1797 upon the death of his grandfather, Sir Robert Burdett, the fourth baronet. With the title, Burdett inherited lands in Foremark and Bramcote in Warwickshire. In 1800 he also inherited Ramsbury Manor, Wiltshire, from his maternal aunt, Lady Jones. This made Burdett a very wealthy man. In November 1793 Burdett's family chaplain, William Bagshaw Stevens wrote in his diary that Burdett stood to inherit up to £13,000¹ per annum from his father, grandfather and aunt. In August 1804 the diarist Joseph Farington estimated Burdett's inheritance at £14,000 per annum, £5,000 of which came from his father, and the remainder from Lady Jones.² However, Burdett's first and, so far, only biographer, M. W. Patterson, believes this to be exaggerated, and claimed that after land tax and other expenses, Burdett's income was closer to £7,500 per annum,³ still a considerable sum. Burdett's wealth at death has been estimated at being under £160,000.⁴

Burdett first entered the House of Commons in October 1796 as MP for Boroughbridge, North Yorkshire, a small town of 680 inhabitants and 64 voters.⁵ The seat was purchased by his father-in-law from the trustees of the fourth Duke of Newcastle⁶ for the sum of £4,000.⁷ Members of the Burdett family had sat in twenty three parliaments between 1290 and 1695. Also, significantly in terms of the direction that Burdett's career would take and his adherence to an eighteenth century Country or 'Tory' outlook throughout his career, his grandfather, Sir Robert Burdett, was a

¹ *Journal of Bagshaw Stevens*, p. 107.

² *Farington Diary*, p. 2391.

³ Patterson, *Burdett*, Volume I, p. 287.

⁴ Baer, M., 'Burdett, Sir Francis' in Matthew, H. C. G., and Harrison, B. (eds.), *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography: From the Earliest Times to the year 2000* (Oxford, 2004).

⁵ Thorne, R. G. (ed.), *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1790-1820* (5 Vols., London, 1986), Volume III, p. 443. For a summary of Burdett's parliamentary career up until 1820 see *ibid.*, pp. 302-314.

⁶ The third duke of Newcastle had died in 1794, leaving a ten-year-old heir.

member of the High Tory Club the Honourable Board of the Loyal Brotherhood⁸ and served as MP for Tamworth for twenty years. During the early period of his career Burdett placed himself firmly amongst the opposition, voting against Pitt's government on a regular basis. He also set himself up as a champion of those whom he regarded as being victimised by the government, particularly Irish radicals, and acquired a reputation for himself as a dangerous radical. Burdett's experience of politics was not a happy one and by 1802 he was ready to retire. However, he was persuaded to stand as an independent candidate for Middlesex and, using his campaign for an improvement in the conditions of political prisoners as his platform, was returned ahead of the government candidate, William Mainwaring. Over the next four years Burdett was unseated twice after successful appeals from Mainwaring over dubious electoral practices. After his second unseating, Burdett expressed a wish to retire from public life, the Middlesex election campaigns having seriously damaged his finances. He resolved to spend no more on electioneering, refused to campaign, and was duly defeated in the 1806 election. By this time Burdett had gained a reputation as an important advocate of reform, both within the House of Commons and amongst extra-parliamentary reformers. It was for this reason that in 1807 leading metropolitan radicals formed the Westminster Committee in order to ensure Burdett's return as MP for Westminster. Burdett took no part in the electoral campaign himself, which was conducted entirely by the Committee on his behalf. Their exertions were successful and Burdett was elected at the head of the poll with a huge majority. He would retain the seat for the next thirty years.

In parliament Burdett promoted a reformist agenda. In 1809 he supported the move for an inquiry into the conduct of the Duke of York and also introduced the first motion for parliamentary reform since Grey's in 1797. The following year Burdett found himself at the centre of a political storm when he was declared guilty of a breach of parliamentary privilege and imprisoned in the Tower of London for the publication of his speech in defence of radical publicist John Gale Jones, who had

⁷ Thorne, *op. cit.*, p. 444.

⁸ See Colley, L. J., 'The Loyal Brotherhood and the Cocoa Tree: The London Organisation of the Tory

been jailed for advertising a debate on government attacks on the liberty of the press held at the British Forum in February 1810. Burdett's arrest and the events surrounding it amounted to one of the most highly publicised events of his career and sparked the largest mob agitation seen in London since 1780. After his release from prison in June 1810 Burdett focused his attentions on his humanitarian campaigns of prison reform and the abolition of flogging in the army. He also continued to raise the issue of parliamentary reform in the Commons, bringing motions before the House in May 1817, June 1818 and July 1819, as well as bombarding the House with reform petitions.

In 1820 Burdett was imprisoned again, this time for seditious libel for his public letter condemning the government for the 'Peterloo Massacre' of August 1819. In the early 1820s, much of Burdett's parliamentary activity revolved around the campaign for Catholic Emancipation, of which he became one of the principal advocates. During this period Burdett formed a close relationship with the parliamentary Whigs, enabling him to act as a mediator between the Whig party and the extra-parliamentary reformers during the emancipation campaign and also during the campaign for parliamentary reform in the late 1820s and early 1830s. Burdett welcomed parliamentary reform when it came in 1832 and was satisfied by the terms of the Act. Much of Burdett's parliamentary career in the 1830s is characterised by his growing dissatisfaction with the Whig government and their alliance with Irish agitator Daniel O'Connell, with whom Burdett began a bitter feud in 1835. He was frequently absent from the House in this period as he suffered repeatedly from attacks of severe gout, which left him bedridden. In 1837 Burdett turned his back on Westminster and stood for election in North Wiltshire, which he represented until his death in 1844. This later period of his life saw Burdett cross the floor of the House and side with Peel's Conservative Party.

II

Given the length of Burdett's political career and his centrality in so many significant political campaigns of the period, it is surprising that he has been so neglected by specialists in nineteenth century history. Burdett's fellow reformers - Major John Cartwright, William Cobbett, and Francis Place - have been the subject of several books and journal articles,⁹ yet to date there has been only one published full length work on Burdett, M. W. Patterson's *Sir Francis Burdett and His Times* (2 Vols., London, 1931), three unpublished doctoral theses, and just two journal articles. At the time of the publication of Patterson's work, a reviewer commented on the absence of any study of Burdett's life, remarking that it

certainly is the plot for a thrilling "bio-novel". Yet Sir Francis has escaped the doubtful honour of being the hero of such a book, and after waiting long for his biographer he has now been compensated for this long neglect.¹⁰

⁹ For Cartwright see Cartwright, F. D. (ed.), *The Life and Correspondence of Major Cartwright*, (2 Vols., London, 1826); Osborne, J. W., *John Cartwright* (Cambridge, 1972); Miller, N. C., 'John Cartwright and Radical Parliamentary Reform, 1808-1819', *EHR* 83 (October 1968) and 'Major John Cartwright and the Founding of the Hampden Club', *HJ* 17 (September 1974); Eckersley, R., 'John Cartwright: Radical Reformer and Unitarian?', *Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society* XXII (April 1999) and 'Of Radical Design: John Cartwright and the Redesign of the Reform Campaign, c.1800-1811', *History* 89 (October 2004).

For Cobbett see Osborne, J. W., *William Cobbett: His Thought and His Times* (New Jersey, 1966); Sambrook, J., *William Cobbett* (London, 1973); Spater, G., *William Cobbett: The Poor Man's Friend* (2 Vols., Cambridge, 1982); Dyck, I., *William Cobbett and Rural Popular Culture* (Cambridge, 1992); Natrass, L., *William Cobbett: The Politics of Style* (Cambridge, 1995); Burton, A., *William Cobbett: Englishman* (London, 1997); Thompson, N., and Eastwood, D. (eds.), *Collected Social and Political Writings of William Cobbett* (17 Vols., London, 1998), Ingrams, R., *The Life and Adventures of William Cobbett* (London, 2005); Dyck, I., 'William Cobbett and the Rural Radical Platform', *Social History* 18 (May 1993).

For Place see Wallas, G., *The Life of Francis Place, 1771-1854* (London, 1898); Kelly, T., *Radical Taylor: The Life and Work of Francis Place (1771-1854)* (London, 1972); Thale, M. (ed.), *The Autobiography of Francis Place (1771-1854)* (Cambridge, 1972); Miles, D., *Francis Place 1771-1854: The Life of a Remarkable Radical* (Sussex, 1988); Jaffe, J. A. (ed.), *The Affairs of Others: The Diaries of Francis Place, 1825-1836* (Cambridge, 2007); Thomas, W. E. S., 'Francis Place and Working Class History', *HJ* 5 (1962); Rowe, D. J., 'Francis Place and the Historian', *HJ* 16 (March 1973).

The exception is Henry Hunt, who has also been the subject of only one full-length work, J. C. Belchem's "*Orator*" *Hunt: Henry Hunt and Working-Class Radicalism* (Oxford, 1985), and very few articles, the principal one being Belchem's 'Henry Hunt and the Evolution of the Mass Platform', *EHR* 93 (October 1978).

¹⁰ Basye, A. H., 'Sir Francis Burdett and His Times (1770-1844)', *The Journal of Modern History*, 4 (March 1932), p. 123.

However, although each of these works has had something to contribute to an understanding of Burdett and his political thought, they have also left a great deal of scope for further study, and Burdett remains largely neglected in general historical works on the early nineteenth century.

Patterson's two volume study of Burdett, published in 1931, is detailed and extensive, drawing heavily on Burdett's personal papers, particularly his letters to his friends and family. Prior to the publication of this work, Burdett's personal papers were closely guarded by the Burdett-Coutts family. After Burdett's death, his papers passed into the hands of his youngest daughter Angela, later Baroness Burdett-Coutts, who did not wish for her father to be written about during her lifetime, possibly because she did not wish for intimate and personal details about the family's troubles, including Burdett's infidelity with Lady Oxford and the family rift over Thomas Coutts's second marriage to the actress Harriot Mellon, to be made public knowledge. This accounts for the absence of any nineteenth century 'Life' of Burdett of the sort written about so many of Burdett's contemporaries, and also explains why no published collection of his papers was undertaken.¹¹ When Angela died in 1906, Burdett's papers remained within the family. Patterson, who was married to Clara Burdett Money-Coutts, one of Burdett's great-granddaughters,¹² was granted 'free access'¹³ to them as a member of the family circle. At the time of its publication, Patterson's work was described by reviewers as 'the standard life of Burdett'¹⁴ and as providing 'a clear portrait of the man and a valid interpretation of his work'.¹⁵ However, the work was criticised for having 'wandered too far afield'¹⁶ on occasion by including chapters on the Coutts family disputes, John Horne Tooke and Roger O'Connor, and

¹¹ Burdett's papers remain unpublished.

¹² Clara was the daughter of Francis Burdett Thomas Coutts-Nevill, 5th Baron Latymer, son of Burdett's daughter Clara Maria Burdett and the Rev. James Drummond Money.

¹³ Basye, A. H., *op. cit.*, p. 123. Similarly C. E. Fryer of McGill University, Montreal, described the work as portraying Burdett 'more justly than has been done hitherto' and as imposing 'a sane sense of proportion in estimating his oddities, his vicissitudes, and his importance as a public character' (Fryer, C. E., 'Sir Francis Burdett and His Times, 1770-1844 by M. W. Patterson', *The American Historical Review* 37 (April 1932), p. 542).

¹⁴ Hurst, G., 'Sir Francis Burdett and His Times (1770-1844)', *EHR* 47 (April 1932), p. 319.

¹⁵ Basye, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

for not having 'that distinction of style which one has come to expect in British biographical writing'.¹⁷ It was also remarked that Patterson had not 'utilized every possible relevant document available for research'.¹⁸ Nevertheless, Patterson's study provides a unique and useful insight into Burdett's views and opinions on a range of subjects.

A year after the publication of Patterson's biography, Burdett became the subject of a doctoral thesis. J. S. Jackson's 'The Public Career of Sir Francis Burdett: The Years of Radicalism, 1796-1815' (PhD, University of Philadelphia, 1932) relies mainly on newspaper reports and parliamentary debates for its information on Burdett. Also, as the title indicates, it contains only a snapshot of Burdett's early public life and lacks the personal insight of Patterson's work, despite its claim to have consulted it. It is likely that Patterson's work was published too late for Jackson to have made any effective use of it. Jackson uses very few manuscript sources in his work, and did not consult the Burdett-Coutts family papers. Moreover, he fails to recognise and explore the role that Irish radicalism had on the impact of Burdett's early career. However, taken together with Patterson's work, it forms a valuable basis from which Burdett can be studied. But there are problems. Since both Patterson and Jackson take a chronological approach, it is difficult to extract from either work a sense of Burdett's core political beliefs and opinions. Moreover, Patterson seems to run out of steam when describing Burdett's post-1830 life and career, while Jackson omits Burdett's later career altogether.

In 1951 an article on Burdett was published in *The Review of English Studies*, entitled 'Sir Francis Burdett and *Oliver Twist*'. This article focused on the claim made by John Forster, an early biographer of Dickens, that Burdett admired Dickens as a champion of the poor. The argument of the article centred around a letter from Dickens to Forster concerning the serialisation of *Oliver Twist*,¹⁹ in which he spoke of

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 125.

¹⁸ Hurst, *op. cit.*, p. 319.

¹⁹ *Oliver Twist*, or, *The Parish Boy's Progress* was serialised in *Bentley's Miscellany* between 1837 and 1839.

favourable comments made on the work by Burdett at a Loyal and Constitutional Association meeting held in Birmingham in December 1838. However, the author of the article, K. J. Fielding, believes that Burdett's reference to the work was merely an attempt to 'enliven a dull speech by comparing a political opponent to one of Dickens's characters'²⁰ rather than a comment on the work itself. Burdett's real opinion of *Oliver Twist* can be gauged by a letter to his daughter Angela, a friend of Dickens, in which he described the work as 'very interesting, very painful, very disgusting'.²¹ Although providing an interesting insight into Burdett's views on poverty in his later life, this article tells the reader virtually nothing about Burdett. It serves only as a challenge to John Forster's *Life of Charles Dickens* (3 Vols., London, 1872-4) rather than providing any examination of Burdett, his career or his political ideology.

In 1967 another PhD student chose Burdett as a subject of study. M. H. R. Bonwick's 'The Radicalism of Sir Francis Burdett and Early Nineteenth Century "Radicalisms"' (PhD, Cornell University, 1967) raises some interesting and important questions about Burdett's political ideas. The first chapter, in particular, in which Bonwick discusses Burdett's political ideology, or his 'Weltanschauung',²² is significant in that it links Burdett's ideas with the concept of ancient constitutionalism. However there are several problems. The work does not discuss the origins of Burdett's ideas, nor does it place them in context. It is also difficult to extract any definitive conclusion from its confusing structure. Bonwick's work focuses mainly on Burdett's involvement with parliamentary reform and his relationships with other reform groups and, as a result, a significant proportion of the work focuses on analysing nineteenth century radicalism in general rather than Burdett in particular. Moreover, although many manuscript sources are consulted, Bonwick does not use the enormously useful and insightful Burdett-Coutts papers, which by this period were in the possession of the Bodleian Library, having been donated to the institution by Burdett's descendants

²⁰ Fielding, K. J., 'Sir Francis Burdett and *Oliver Twist*', *The Review of English Studies* 2 (April 1951), p. 156.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

²² Bonwick, M. H. R., 'The Radicalism of Sir Francis Burdett (1770-1844) and Early

in 1944. Finally, and crucially, Bonwick failed to recognise the importance of Ireland and Irish issues to Burdett's career and completely ignored his involvement with Irish revolutionaries in his early career. Irish politics was a central part of Burdett's career and thus it is an essential consideration in any discussion of Burdett's 'Radicalism'.

More recent works on Burdett have a stronger analytical focus. During the 1980s two important works were produced, the first of which was J. R. Dinwiddy's article 'Sir Francis Burdett and Burdettite Radicalism'.²³ Here Dinwiddy focused on the strength of support for Burdett, which he claimed has been underrated, and attributed to Burdett the 'country ideology' of the early eighteenth century, which focused on the ancient constitution and traditional liberties, the threat of parliamentary corruption, political independence and the role that the landed gentry should play in the government of the nation. In addition Dinwiddy refuted the idea that Burdett was a mock-reformer, rejecting claims that his radical sympathies cooled after 1810. Dinwiddy's article raises some very interesting questions about Burdett and his political ideas. However, being only a short article, there is little scope for any depth of analysis and many of the ideas within it need to be taken further. Moreover, the article only focuses on the period up to 1820. C. S. Hodlin adopted considerably similar views to Dinwiddy, and further developed them in her work, 'The Political Career of Sir Francis Burdett' (D. Phil., Oxford University, 1989). She maintained that the course of Burdett's career proves that he adhered to the country ideology throughout and noted that his commitment to this set of beliefs, of which independence was the most important, ensured that his political alliances constantly changed, hence the charge of inconsistency. Hodlin concludes that in the 1800s Burdett's views made him appear radical, in the 1820s they were reflected in the Whig programme, while in the 1830s they were more consistent with Peel's Conservative party. Hodlin's work is the only work since Patterson's to make extensive use of the vast quantity of manuscript material relating to Burdett. However, she does not consult the Burdett-Jones family papers, which although

Nineteenth-Century "Radicalisms" (PhD, Cornell University, 1967), p. 13.

²³ Published in *History* 65 (1980). The article is reprinted in Dinwiddy, J. R., *Radicalism and Reform*

relating mainly to estate and family business, do contain some useful material about Burdett's politics. Moreover, Hodlin fails to recognise the centrality of Irish issues in the development of Burdett's political career. Nevertheless, Dinwiddy's and Hodlin's claims that Burdett adhered consistently to the country ideology is a sound argument, and so challenging it will not be the subject of my study.

III

The problem is one of approach. Looking at Burdett's career in a chronological, episodic manner, as Hodlin has done, presents a confused and haphazard picture of his beliefs and ideology. Burdett embraced a number of different political campaigns during his career, which broadly fall into three main categories: constitutionalism, the Irish question, and reform. Many of these campaigns occupied a large part of Burdett's career, but were taken up as an issue or temporarily sidelined depending upon the political climate. It is only by analysing each of these themes separately and assessing each campaign in its entirety that we can gain a sense of how each theme, and each campaign, fitted in with a clearly defined and consistent political agenda. Only then can we fully understand Burdett as a politician. Thus, using a thematic rather than the chronological approach adopted in previous studies, I will draw a more comprehensive and conclusive picture of Burdett's political ideology and its applicability to his political concerns. Furthermore, I will reinterpret and analyse Burdett's role in Irish affairs, something which has been neglected in other works but, as this thesis contends, is actually a crucial factor in understanding Burdett's political philosophy. Previous works on Burdett have told his political story; this work is a political analysis.

There is clearly a need for further research on Burdett as, despite the progress made by Dinwiddy and Hodlin, Burdett still remains relatively overlooked by historians who specialise in the political history of the early nineteenth century. He has been briefly summarised and then dismissed, possibly because of the events of his later

career, particularly his drift towards conservatism in the mid to late 1830s. In this sense Burdett has become the victim of historiographical fashion. In works of the 1960s and 1970s upper-class reformers like Burdett tended to be sidelined by historians of the reform movement, because of their social status. Instead, working-class 'heroes' were celebrated and their roles in the reform movement emphasised at the expense of upper-class advocates of reform. Thompson and Harvey, for example, have both criticised Burdett, Thompson describing him as 'a weak reform leader'²⁴ and Harvey dismissing him for having 'few ideas of his own' and giving 'little in terms of ideology or inspiration'²⁵ to the reform movement. In studies on Irish politics during the nineteenth century, Burdett's role has been relatively ignored and marginalised. He has been the victim of an O'Connell dominated historiography. Although more recent historiography has begun to focus more on the importance and significance of men like Burdett, appreciating the vital links between working-class, middle-class and upper-class radicalism during the early nineteenth century, Burdett continues to be a figure to whom labels are applied without any explanation, and that are often contradictory. Burdett has been labelled a Whig, a Tory, a mock-reformer, a moderate reformer, and a dangerous Radical. In the last decade alone, Burdett has been termed a 'Tory Radical',²⁶ 'a crusading reformer',²⁷ a 'democrat',²⁸ and a 'republican'.²⁹ No political tradition has sought to claim Burdett as its own and it is probable that he has eluded historians for so long because he does not easily fit into any category as he was not fully part of either a parliamentary party and nor was he fully committed to any organised extra-parliamentary radical movement.

The purpose of this thesis is not to provide a biography of Burdett. Nor is it an attempt to rehabilitate Burdett's reputation from the contemptuous dismissal of

²⁴ Thompson, E. P., *The Making of the English Working Class* (London, 1963), p. 499.

²⁵ Harvey, A. D., *Britain in the Early Nineteenth Century* (London, 1978), p. 223.

²⁶ Hilton, B., *A Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People?: England 1783-1846* (Oxford, 2006), p. 519.

²⁷ Conner, C. D., *Colonel Despard: The Life and Times of an Anglo-Irish Rebel* (Pennsylvania, 2000), p. 193.

²⁸ Graham, J., *The Nation, The Law and The King, Reform Politics in England, 1789-1799* (2 Vols., Maryland, 2000), Volume II, p. 723.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 826.

historians such as Thompson and Harvey. I have chosen Burdett as the focus of study because I believe he is an important representative of an element of nineteenth century politics that has been passed over in studies of the period; a group of politicians who had more in common with the reformers of the mid- to late-eighteenth century, but who remained relevant and influential in their own day. These men served as the keystone of liberal reform for decades by placing pressure on the House of Commons to pass reform measures and also by moderating the more radical elements outside the House. Burdett is one of the most important examples of this type of politician and it is for this reason that we need to know about him.

This thesis is divided into four chapters. The first chapter analyses Burdett's core philosophy and forms the foundation of the rest of the work. It focuses on Burdett as the champion of liberty and defender of the constitution, looking at his views on rights and liberties, and his constitutional beliefs, ideas which served as a unifying aspect for all his political campaigns. It looks at Burdett's influences and traces the origins of his beliefs back to their roots, demonstrating how he applied them during his career. An appreciation of these beliefs is essential in understanding Burdett as a politician and in order to make sense of the rest of his political campaigns. Finally, this chapter examines in detail his reputation as a defender of liberty and a champion of the constitution during his own lifetime, weighing it up against his reputation as a radical.

The second chapter explores Burdett's reputation as a radical in more depth by analysing his involvement with Irish politics, particularly his association with Irish radicals in his early career and the significant impact it had on the direction of his politics thereafter. It will also examine the important and prominent role Burdett played in the Catholic emancipation campaign, his relationship with Daniel O'Connell and the impact of the breakdown of that relationship on his political outlook in the late 1830s. This chapter places Burdett's involvement with Irish politics in its ideological context. Burdett's involvement with Irish issues is arguably the single most important element of his career in the sense that it had a formative

influence on the direction of his career and essentially shaped Burdett as a politician, as well as influencing the perception of him during his lifetime. In his early career Burdett's Irish connection established him as a 'radical' in the eyes of his contemporaries, while in his later career, it pushed him towards Conservatism. However, it has been the subject of the least amount of study. No other work to date has analysed Burdett's involvement with Ireland in any depth.

The third chapter examines Burdett's role in the parliamentary reform campaign of the period, focusing on his attitude to parliamentary reform, how far he was willing to go on the issue, what he hoped reform would achieve, and how parliamentary reform fitted in with his overall political agenda. It explores Burdett's relationship with other leading reformers of the day and his response to reform in later life, assessing how these impacted on his reputation as a reformer during his own lifetime. Parliamentary reform was an essential element of Burdett's political philosophy as it represented to him the means by which ancient rights and liberties would be restored and protected. It was a campaign that occupied a great deal of his political career, and for which he is best known, and thus an examination of Burdett's attitude to reform and his involvement in the parliamentary reform campaign must form a significant part in any study of his political ideas and his reputation.

While the first three chapters of this thesis analyse aspects of Burdett's reputation during his own lifetime, the fourth and final chapter of this thesis explores Burdett's reputation since his death. It does so by analysing his representation in historical works. It considers the various labels that have been applied to him - Radical, Reformer, Whig and Tory/Conservative - and explains their origins and relevance.

This thesis concludes that Burdett's political philosophy was consistent throughout his career, and firmly based in seventeenth and eighteenth century thought. It demonstrates that Irish politics had an enormously significant impact on the direction of Burdett's career, something which other works on Burdett have failed to recognise. Finally, it establishes him as an important political figure, who played a major role in

political campaigns of the period, notably the struggles for Catholic emancipation and parliamentary reform.

Chapter 1

The Champion of Liberty: Burdett and the Constitution

At the Middlesex Election in 1804, Burdett declared to the assembled crowd

It has been industriously spread that I am hostile to the English Constitution I am an enemy to its abuses, which I shall ever actively and loudly reprobate. If I have abused a corrupt ministry, who have abused the royal prerogative, and trampled on your rights and privileges, shall it be said I am an enemy to Englishmen? My principles stand on the genuine basis of the British Constitution, they as nearly concern the stability of the throne, as the happiness of the people.¹

It was a typical statement from a man whose battles with successive ministries reveal that he was a politician who adhered firmly to what he regarded as the established laws and constitution of England. Burdett's actions throughout his career and in all of the political causes he adopted were governed by his perception of the rights and liberties afforded by the English constitution, which, as will be demonstrated in this section, was firmly grounded in traditional legal and constitutional thought and can be linked to the ideas of the neo-Harringtonian and Country thinkers of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, particularly the doctrine of ancient constitutionalism. Burdett himself was keen to highlight the connection between his own ideas and those of earlier constitutional thinkers. There was nothing new or innovative about any of his ideas. Burdett inherited the ideology of the eighteenth century and applied it to the problems of his own day. His novelty lay not in the originality of his ideas but in way he applied them, in a radical manner. The perception of Burdett as 'radical' in this sense and the reason he aroused the wrath of the government were based on the way in which he spoke and his reaction to their censure. In his dealings with the Executive, which were motivated by his attitude towards the constitution and his view of rights and liberties, Burdett was highly provocative in tone and in application but moderate in policy.

This chapter establishes a sense of Burdett's core political philosophy. It was this philosophy that governed all aspects of his political career and so an examination of it is crucial to any study of him. The first part of this chapter establishes Burdett's constitutional beliefs and places them in context, highlighting the links between Burdett's constitutional ideas and those of the eighteenth century. The second part of this chapter examines the ways in which Burdett put these ideas into practice throughout his career, focusing in particular on how he defended constitutional rights and liberties against the encroachments of government. It looks at how Burdett established himself as a champion of liberty and defender of the constitution, whilst representing the government as the real danger to liberty. The third section analyses Burdett's reputation as a champion of liberty and defender of the constitution during his own lifetime, balancing it against his radical reputation. A short concluding section will discuss how Burdett's strong commitment to liberty and the constitution ensured that he followed a path of moderation throughout his career.

I

The ideas expressed by Burdett throughout his career are consistent with the doctrine of ancient constitutionalism. This concept centred around the idea that the constitution of England was immemorial and argued that its legitimacy and value were based on its usage throughout history, not on any rationalisation of the principles contained within it. Consequently, ancient constitutionalists rejected the concept of natural rights, instead basing their arguments on historical precedent. The idea has three essential elements: custom, or the common law, which is unwritten and has been practised for as long as can be remembered; continuity, the idea that English constitutional history could be traced back to its earliest documents with no breaks or ruptures; and balance, between the liberties of the subject and the prerogatives of the crown. Ancient constitutionalism is rooted in the early seventeenth century, when it was used by the likes of Chief Justice Sir Edward Coke, lawyer and poet Sir John Davies and politician and author Nathaniel Bacon to challenge the growing arbitrary

¹ *Middlesex Election 1804*, p. 27-8.

power of the Stuart Kings. However, it became increasingly popular when it was fused with the ideas of political theorist James Harrington (1611-1677) and adopted by neo-Harringtonian and Country thinkers, particularly Henry St John, Viscount Bolingbroke (1678-1751), and his followers during their opposition to Walpole in the 1720s and 1730s.

The neo-Harringtonian and Country programme, as well as adopting the ancient constitutionalist thought, was characterised by a suspicion of court and courtiers, particularly of their ability to corrupt parliament. Its main objectives were to root out corruption, establish cheap and honest government, restore ancient constitutional liberties, and restrict government interference in the lives of British people. During the late seventeenth and throughout the eighteenth century neo-Harringtonian and Country ideas were used by opposition politicians to criticise the government. In the late seventeenth century they were adopted by Anthony Ashley Cooper, the first earl of Shaftesbury, poet and satirist Andrew Marvell and political writer Henry Neville. In the early eighteenth century neo-Harringtonian ideas were used by publicists John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon in their weekly publication the *Independent Whig* and also in their pseudonymous 'Cato' letters, which were published in the *London Journal*. In the mid-eighteenth century the concept of ancient constitutionalism was used by Sir William Blackstone in his famous *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (4 Vols., Oxford, 1765-9), considered at the time as the most important work on British constitutional thought. Later in the eighteenth century it was used by Edmund Burke, and then by Joseph Priestley, Richard Price, John Jebb and Major John Cartwright in the campaign for economical, political and religious reform. Of the latter it has been stated that 'They, and others in the late-eighteenth century, helped to bring the period of the Country ideology to a close'.² However, the ideas and arguments of the neo-Harringtonian and Country ideologues, particularly ancient constitutionalism, formed the core of Burdett's constitutional creed, and the style and tactics that they employed became characteristic of his own approach, demonstrating

² Fruchtman, J., *Apocalyptic Politics of Richard Price and Joseph Priestley: A Study in Late Eighteenth Century English Republican Millennialism* (Philadelphia, 1983), p. 66-7.

that these ideas were in fact relevant and influential well into the nineteenth century. Burdett's adherence to these ideas also explains his rejection of other types of radicalism which were influential during the early nineteenth century, notably that of the Painites and Spenceans.

Burdett's constitutional beliefs were reflected in those of his close friend, the veteran radical John Horne Tooke (1736-1812),³ with whom he became acquainted whilst in his twenties. Horne Tooke was a former clergyman who, in the mid-1760s, became disillusioned with the government and became involved in politics. In 1765 he published an anonymous pamphlet entitled *The Petition of an Englishman*, which heavily criticised the government, and struck up a friendship with radical politician John Wilkes.⁴ During the general election of 1768 Horne Tooke worked tirelessly for the Wilkesite cause in Middlesex and was also active in the agitations following Wilkes's expulsion from the House in 1769. He was also one of the founding members of the Society of the Supporters of the Bill of Rights, a group whose aim was to work to defend the liberty of the people. However, in reality, its primary purpose was to raise money through subscriptions in order to relieve Wilkes's debts. In 1771, tired of Wilkes abusing the financial generosity of the Society, Horne Tooke withdrew from it and engaged in a bitter and very public dispute with Wilkes. He remained politically active for the rest of his life. In the 1770s he was twice arrested for libel, once in 1774, when he was acquitted, and again in 1777, which resulted in a year's prison sentence. In July 1781 Horne Tooke became a member of the Society for Constitutional Information (SCI), which was established in 1780 by middle-class reformers in order to provide information about the British constitution, the liberties of the subject and the benefits of reform to the lower classes. The principal work of the SCI was the printing and distribution of political works, several of which included extracts from English political writers such as Coke, Harrington and Bolingbroke. By the early 1790s Horne Tooke had become its most dominant voice.

³ He was born John Horne but added the 'Tooke' to his name in 1782 in honour of his friend and benefactor William Tooke.

Horne Tooke was a controversial figure and, in the wake of the French Revolution, was viewed with suspicion by the government. As one of the leading lights in the SCI, Horne Tooke was responsible for the distribution of the first part of Paine's *Rights of Man* (1791). He also helped to draw up the constitution of the London Corresponding Society (LCS), a group founded in 1782 by the shoe-maker Thomas Hardy in order to promote parliamentary reform, and assisted in the establishment of reform clubs around London. The weekly Sunday dinners at Horne Tooke's Wimbledon home, at which a variety of political topics would be discussed and of which Burdett later became a regular attendee, also aroused government suspicion. Between 1792 and 1794 the government intercepted Horne Tooke's mail and in May 1794 arrested him on suspicion of high treason; he was later acquitted. Horne Tooke attempted to stand for parliament three times, in 1790, 1796 and 1801. He was unsuccessful on the first two occasions and successful on the third, but was disqualified by an act disbarring those in holy orders from sitting in the House of Commons. Horne Tooke was a firm believer in the ancient principles of the constitution, a theme which became common in Burdett's speeches over the years. He advocated a constitutional reform based on a re-establishment of the first principles of the constitution, those which had been confirmed at the Glorious Revolution, but allegedly subverted since by government corruption and the Commons' usurpation of the royal prerogative.

According to Horne Tooke's biographer, Alexander Stephens, Burdett and Horne Tooke were first introduced in 1797 and quickly became very close. They spoke on a daily basis and studied together, mainly the 'Latin classics',⁵ and Burdett became a 'constant visitor and guest'⁶ to Horne Tooke's Wimbledon home. Burdett deeply respected Horne Tooke even before having met him, writing to his family chaplain William Bagshaw Stevens in 1794 'Heads as his are not made every day ... He is a very valuable man'.⁷ In 1800 Burdett composed a poem about his friend, describing

⁴ For more on Wilkes, and comparisons between Burdett and Wilkes, see section III of this chapter.

⁵ *Memoirs of Horne Tooke*, Volume II, p. 233.

⁶ Ibid. Joseph Farington also commented on Burdett and Horne Tooke's close relationship, remarking in August 1807 'Sir Francis Burdet dines with Horne Tooke every Sunday & sometimes sleeps there on that night for a month together' (*Farington Diary*, p. 3112).

⁷ *Journal of Bagshaw Stevens*, p. 210. Burdett to Stevens, 30 November 1794. Burdett made this

him as 'Oppression's constant Foe',⁸ and in 1817 he displayed a bust of Horne Tooke at his London home.⁹ The two men remained very close until Horne Tooke's death in 1812. Many believed that Burdett was dominated by Horne Tooke. Lady Shelley, for example, described Burdett as 'a mere puppet in the hands of Horne Tooke'.¹⁰ Similarly, Henry Hunt remarked that Horne Tooke 'certainly made Sir F. Burdett a puppet'¹¹ and noted that 'Sir F. Burdett gloried in being a disciple of Mr. Tooke'.¹² In April 1810 *The Aberdeen Journal* described Horne Tooke as Burdett's 'arch adviser'.¹³ Stephens described the relationship between the two men as that of a 'fond father' and a 'darling son'¹⁴ and noted that it was rumoured at the time that Horne Tooke 'endeavoured to form [Burdett's] mind in public business'.¹⁵ Essayist and literary critic William Hazlitt also claimed that Horne Tooke used Burdett as 'his spokesman in the House and to the country'¹⁶ and remarked on the strong influence that he believed Horne Tooke had on Burdett's political development, claiming

There is only one error he [Burdett] seems to labour under (which, we believe, he also borrowed from Mr. Horne Tooke or Major Cartwright), the wanting to go back to the early times of our Constitution and history in search of the principles of law and liberty.¹⁷

comment in response to reports of Horne Tooke's acquittal.

⁸ The entire poem reads as follows:

Behold the Man who touched by human Woe
Stood though alone Oppression's constant Foe
With Reason's light reviv'd the Patriot Flame
And dragg'd forth Public Guilt to Public Shame.
Fell Vengeance arm'd Corruption's harpy Tribe
And strove to murder who She could not bribe.
Dauntless he braved the storm, still undismayed
Proclaim'd the People and their Rights betrayd
Made Nero tremble on his bloodstaind Throne
And Truth and Freedom marked him for their own.

(Ibid., p. 504).

⁹ Bamford, *Passages*, p. 23.

¹⁰ Edgcombe, R. (ed.), *The Diary of Frances, Lady Shelley 1818-1873*, London, 1912-13, Volume II, p. 35.

¹¹ Hunt, *Memoirs*, Volume I, p. 502.

¹² Ibid., p. 503.

¹³ *The Aberdeen Journal*, 18 April 1810.

¹⁴ *Memoirs of Horne Tooke*, Volume II, p. 306.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Hazlitt, W., *The Spirit of the Age*, 1825, p. 88.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 230.

In many prints of the period Burdett was portrayed as being completely dominated by Horne Tooke. In Gillray's *Preparing for the Grand Attack – or – A Private Rehearsal of "the ci-devant Ministry in Danger"* (1801), Burdett is shown reading from a huge scroll entitled 'Ministerial Crimes', which Horne Tooke is still writing.¹⁸ Rowlandson's *The Old Man of the Sea. Sticking to the Shoulders of Sinbad the Sailor* (17 May 1807) shows Burdett, with Horne Tooke on his back wading through the 'Mire of Politics' from 'Independence and a Comfortable Life' to 'Treasury Rocks' and 'Ministerial Shoals'. Burdett remarks 'This old man will be the end of me at last - what a miry place he has brought me into', while Horne Tooke exclaims 'Persevere, persevere, you are the only man to get through'.¹⁹ Gillray's *Election Candidates: – or – The Republican Goose at the Top of the Pole – the Devil helping behind!* (20 May 1807) shows Burdett as a goose with an injured leg being supported at the top of the poll by a pitchfork wielded by Horne Tooke.²⁰ Williams's *The First Exploit of the Modern Quixote or John Bull turned Sancho Panza* (June 1807) shows Burdett attacking a large red book of 'pensions' and 'sinecures' with a sword upon which is written 'Tooks favoured steel'. He exclaims 'I will not stop ... till I have cut out the accursed leaves of the Red Book'. Horne Tooke lurks in the background remarking 'Come, come my pupil goes on better than I expected'.²¹ Another William's print of 1807, *The Head of the Poll, or the Westminster Shewman and His Puppet*, shows Horne Tooke supporting Burdett on a pole. Burdett is seen to remark 'Huzza, Liberty and Independence', while Horne Tooke describes Burdett as 'The finest puppet in the world Gentlemen - entirely of my own formation, I have only to say the word and he'll do anything'.²² Williams's *British Zoology or Tower Curiosities* (1810) presents Burdett as a caged goose saying 'Took, Took'.²³

¹⁸ BMS 9739. See Appendix 1.

¹⁹ BMS 10731. See Appendix 2.

²⁰ Bod., John Johnson Political and Satirical Prints Collection, Political Cartoons 2 (29). See Appendix 3.

²¹ Ibid., Political Cartoons 2 (33). See Appendix 4.

²² BMS 10733. See Appendix 5.

²³ Bod., John Johnson Political and Satirical Prints Collection. Political Cartoons 2 (67). Appendix 6.

The idea that Burdett was dominated by Horne Tooke has also been advanced in secondary works on the period. The Bewleys described Burdett as Horne Tooke's 'ewe lamb'²⁴ and claimed that Horne Tooke used him 'to continue the political work which he was now too old and infirm to pursue with vigour'.²⁵ Harvey saw the relationship between the two men in a similar way, describing Burdett as Horne Tooke's 'disciple'²⁶ and claiming that it was from Horne Tooke that Burdett 'derived most of his ideas'.²⁷ Hone described Burdett as 'perhaps the most important of Horne Tooke's acolytes',²⁸ while Cannon described him as a 'protégé' of Horne Tooke, as did Stevenson and Conner.²⁹ However, although there is little doubt that Burdett held Horne Tooke in the highest regard and learned a great deal from him, he was far from being completely under his influence. Burdett's political ideas were not borrowed from Horne Tooke; the friendship merely allowed him to refine and develop beliefs he already held by discussing them with someone who had similar opinions. Burdett had already outlined his political path and made known his 'ardent desire of promoting the welfare and liberty of Mankind, and more especially of my own Countrymen'³⁰ before his friendship with Horne Tooke had begun. One of Burdett's portraits, painted by Sir Thomas Lawrence around the time of Burdett's marriage to Sophia Coutts, and thus before he became friends with Horne Tooke, clearly demonstrates Burdett's commitment to ancient constitutionalism. Burdett is shown standing next to a column, at the foot of which lies a 'Doomsday' book. On top of the column are ancient scrolls and Burdett himself has his hand on the bust of an early English king.³¹ Patterson acknowledges that 'Horne Tooke had great influence on the development of Burdett's political views ... but that influence took the form of not changing or perverting

²⁴ Bewley, C. and D., *Gentlemen Radical: A Life of John Horne Tooke, 1736-1812* (London, 1998), p. 218.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 198.

²⁶ Harvey, A. D., *Britain in the Early Nineteenth Century* (London, 1978), p. 226.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 222.

²⁸ Hone, J. A., *For the Cause of Truth: Radicalism in London 1796-1821* (Oxford, 1982), p. 29.

²⁹ Cannon, J., *Parliamentary Reform 1640-1832* (Cambridge, 1973), p. 151; Stevenson, J., *Popular Disturbances in England 1700-1870* (London, 1979), p. 181; and Conner, C. D., *Arthur O'Connor: The Most Important Irish Revolutionary You May Never Have Heard Of* (New York, 2009), p. 40.

³⁰ *Journal of Bagshaw Stevens*, p. 377. Burdett to Bagshaw Stevens, 10 June 1796.

³¹ NPG 3820. See the title page of this work.

Burdett's view, but of confirming their natural evolution'.³² Burdett certainly did not bow to Horne Tooke's every whim. Horne Tooke warned Burdett against standing for Middlesex in 1802³³ and thereafter regularly advised him to give up his seat in parliament, but Burdett refused to do so. Horne Tooke's etymological work *The Diversions of Purley*³⁴ demonstrates the nature of the relationship between the two men. The second volume³⁵ takes the form of a discussion between Burdett and Horne Tooke on the nature and origins of language. Although it was fundamentally Horne Tooke's work and it was unlikely that the discussions between the two actually took place in the form in which they are presented, Burdett's name would not have been attached to the work without his consent, and it is highly likely that he read the work before its publication and agreed to its contents. In the first chapter Horne Tooke declares that he and Burdett shall never 'differ much in our actions, wishes or opinions'.³⁶ However, in the text Burdett does challenge his mentor. Indeed it appears to be Burdett's purpose in the text to question Horne Tooke's theories. *Diversions* also reveals a difference of opinion between the two men over the nature and origins of the constitution. Horne Tooke states

I revere the Constitution and constitutional LAWS of England, because they are in conformity with the LAWS of God and nature: and upon these are founded the rational RIGHTS of Englishmen.³⁷

However, Burdett rarely referred to God-given or natural rights in his speeches, preferring to base his arguments on historical precedent.

Burdett regarded the constitution of England as the 'standard by which and by which alone, every act and proceeding by any man or body of men ought to be measured'.³⁸

³² Patterson, *Burdett*, Volume I, p. 118.

³³ *Farington Diary*, p. 2397. In *A Letter to the Editor of the Times* (London, 1807) Horne Tooke mentions how he advised Burdett against standing for Middlesex.

³⁴ In *The Diversions of Purley* Horne Tooke developed a materialist language theory, which argued that all words can be traced back to nouns and verbs, which are derived from experiences of the modern world.

³⁵ The first volume was published in 1796 and the second in 1805. A third volume was planned but Horne Tooke destroyed the manuscript shortly before his death.

³⁶ Horne Tooke, J., *The Diversions of Purley* (1829), Volume II, p. 2.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

³⁸ *Burdett to his constituents*, 1810, p. 14.

Its essential elements were the Magna Carta, which he believed ‘could not be repealed or altered’ unless by the people,³⁹ the Habeas Corpus Act (1679), of which Burdett declared ‘Was any part of the Constitution preferable to another, it was this act’,⁴⁰ and the Bill of Rights (1689), which he regarded as ‘a new Magna Carta’.⁴¹ Together these three documents preserved the liberty of the people, defending them from arbitrary imprisonment and affording them specific rights such as freedom of speech, trial by jury, protection from arbitrary imprisonment, the right to petition and assembly, free elections, the right to own property, and fair representation in the House of Commons.⁴² Burdett’s understanding of the concept of liberty was defined by these three documents, which he referred to frequently in his speeches. At a dinner held at the Crown and Anchor Tavern, London in 1804, for example, he proposed a toast to ‘The retrospect of Magna Charta and the Bill of Rights, and respect to the fragments that remain of British liberty’.⁴³ In April 1808 Burdett remarked that ‘the good old laws of the land, Magna Charta, Bill of Rights, and Act of Settlement, should be restored, by repealing all those unconstitutional acts which had nearly annihilated them’.⁴⁴ The date of Burdett’s first reform proposal, 15 June 1809, was specifically chosen to remind MPs of the Magna Carta, signed by King John on the same day 594 years earlier. In the pamphlet edition of Burdett’s parliamentary speech in defence of Gale Jones in 1810, extracts from the Magna Carta serve as frontispieces. Copies of the Magna Carta and Bill of Rights were also printed to serve as accompaniments to the text.⁴⁵ These additions to his speech are a clear and strong identification of his case with the ideas contained within them. Moreover, according to contemporary reports, when he was arrested in 1810 ‘Sir Francis was employed in hearing his son (who had just come from Eton School) read and translate the Magna

³⁹ *The Times*, 21 February 1811.

⁴⁰ *PR*, 3rd Series, Volume X, p. 530.

⁴¹ *PD*, Volume XXXVIII, p. 1128. Bolingbroke referred to the entire Revolution Settlement in exactly the same terms, describing it in 1735 as a ‘new magna charta’ (*A Dissertation Upon Parties* (1735), Letter I. Bolingbroke, Works 2, Volume III, p. 44).

⁴² See Chapter 3.

⁴³ *The Times*, 27 July 1804.

⁴⁴ *CPD*, Volume XI, p. 28.

⁴⁵ See *Magna Carta and the Bill of Rights with an account of the attacks and encroachments made on the Rights and Liberties of the People of England as connected with the subject of Sir Francis Burdett’s address to his constituents* (London, 1810).

Charta'.⁴⁶ Although more than likely a contrived incident on Burdett's part, it demonstrates that he was keen for others to know that he regarded it as an important document that should be known to all whose rights were enshrined within it. His dedication to the ancient constitution of England stayed with him throughout his career. In May 1837 he described the English Constitution as

a constitution planned and tempered so as to unite all the advantages of every species of government known in the civilized world, and to be divested of any of those disadvantages which more than counterbalanced the beneficial consequence of any other form of government, however, praised or boasted of. The forefathers of the people of England had erected for them a political fabric, such as the ablest statesmen and the greatest philosophers of all ages and countries concurred in, regarding it as the perfection of human policy. Such were the principles of the British constitution which had lasted for ages past, and such the estimation in which they were held by other nations.⁴⁷

Two key phrases, which Burdett used throughout his career, were 'restore' and 'recover'. In 1802 he informed the freeholders of Middlesex that he would 'never think any sacrifice of mine too great to assist in restoring our country to its former freedom and blessedness'.⁴⁸ In 1804 Burdett appealed to the Middlesex freeholders to 'help restore that Constitution to its primitive lustre and purity'⁴⁹ by electing him as their parliamentary representative. At a Westminster meeting in March 1809 he called upon the freeholders to demand that the government 'restore to the people their rights'.⁵⁰ In parliament in January 1811 Burdett claimed that if 'restored to their rights'⁵¹ the people would be able to protect themselves from arbitrary government. At a Westminster meeting in December 1819 he urged the people to demand 'the

⁴⁶ *The Morning Chronicle*, 10 April 1810.

⁴⁷ *The Times*, 6 May 1837.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 30 July 1802.

⁴⁹ *Middlesex Election 1804*, p. 28.

⁵⁰ *The Examiner*, 2 April 1809.

⁵¹ *CPD*, Volume XVIII, p. 672.

restoration of the constitution'.⁵² Burdett believed that the encroachments of parliament, particularly those since the Civil War, had subverted the constitution of the land. In November 1800 he lamented the fate of 'that old English constitution, formerly the envy of other nations, and the pride and idol of our own', which had been 'miserably deformed, or rather almost destroyed'.⁵³ He believed that it was only by a return to the 'free principles of the constitution that order and satisfaction could be restored'.⁵⁴ He wanted to see 'the old landmarks and privileges of the constitution ... restored'⁵⁵ and 'the good old laws of the land, Magna Charta, Bill of Rights, and Act of Settlement ... restored'.⁵⁶ Burdett saw this as a remedy to the country's ills, particularly parliamentary corruption and government repression. In November 1798 he appealed to the King to promote unity amongst his people by 'let[ting] the People be restored to their rights and liberties - let the old law of the land be again made the rule of action'.⁵⁷ This concept was a staple of Neo-Harringtonian and Country thought. Neo-Harringtonians rephrased Harrington's call for a return to 'ancient prudence' in order to bring it in line with their reverence for the ancient constitution and medieval law, which they believed if restored would cure all ills. Bolingbroke claimed that liberty would be restored by preserving the old order and old laws, and by 'reinfusing into the minds of men the spirit of this constitution'.⁵⁸ He also claimed that the security of the country would remain 'precarious, unless our ancient constitution be restored'.⁵⁹

Closely linked with the idea of restoring the ancient constitution, and another Country/neo-Harringtonian trait adopted by Burdett, was the use of historical precedent. In *The Commonwealth of Oceana* (1656) Harrington highlighted the importance of the study of history for students of government, and eighteenth-century opposition politicians often appealed to historical examples in their arguments against

⁵² *The Liverpool Mercury*, 17 December 1819.

⁵³ *PR*, 3rd Series, Volume XIII, p. 256.

⁵⁴ *PD*, Volume XXXVIII, p. 1124.

⁵⁵ *PR*, 4th Series, Volume I, p. 311-2.

⁵⁶ *CPD*, Volume XI, London, 1808, p. 28.

⁵⁷ *PR*, 3rd Series, Volume VII, p. 50.

⁵⁸ *Patriot King*, p. 38.

government infringements of the constitution. Between 1730 and 1731 Bolingbroke wrote a series of twenty-four letters on English history, collectively entitled *Remarks on the History of England*. The letters trace the history of liberty and the English constitution from Roman times through to the reign of Charles I and discuss their treatment at the hands of various monarchs. Bolingbroke claimed that their purpose was to revive the spirit of liberty and remind men of the true principles of the constitution. Appealing to the past was an important part of ancient constitutionalism because it emphasised continuity, which was one of the doctrine's key elements. To regard events such as the Norman Conquest or the Glorious Revolution as having major constitutional significance threatened this notion. For this reason, ancient constitutionalists denied that any constitutional change took place, asserting that these events merely confirmed liberties already in existence. Ancient constitutionalists rejected the Norman Yoke theory, a concept which regarded the Anglo-Saxon constitution as the model of liberty, freedom and equality and claimed that the Norman invasion in 1066 had deprived the English people of their rights and liberties. Instead, it was argued that William I did not conquer England and enforce a new set of laws on its subjects, but that he actually promised to uphold the ancient law already in place. The Norman Conquest was not seen as having an adverse effect of the liberty of the English people; it was the behaviour of subsequent monarchs since the Norman invasion that had governed the fortunes of liberty. Bolingbroke believed that 'the principles of the Saxon Commonwealth ... prevailed through all subsequent changes' and also claimed that 'the liberties of the Saxon freemen' were 'never conquered'.⁶⁰ Although Bolingbroke acknowledged that William I 'imposed many new laws and customs' and 'made very great alterations in the whole model of government', he rejected the idea that the Normans had destroyed 'the old constitution', remarking 'On the contrary, the Normans, and other strangers, who settled here, were soon seized with it themselves'.⁶¹ Bolingbroke saw the history of England since the Conquest as a struggle between good, or liberty, and evil, or faction. Between the Conquest and the Civil War England had seen reigns of liberty, such as those of Edward III, Henry V

⁵⁹ *A Dissertation Upon Parties* (1735), Letter XI. Bolingbroke, *Works 2*, Volume III, p. 190.

⁶⁰ *Remarks on the History of England* (1730), Letter IV. Bolingbroke, *Works 2*, Volume II, p. 159.

and Elizabeth I, and reigns of faction, such as those of Richard II, Henry VII, Charles I and James I. Burdett also did not see the Norman Conquest as having a negative impact on liberty. In 1818 he noted that William I, 'vulgarly called the Conqueror', had obtained the crown 'by compact and agreement'⁶² not by conquest and was bound by his coronation oath to govern by the laws of the Saxons. That he did not abide by this oath was 'no argument against its validity',⁶³ it was simply one violation of the constitution in a long line of such violations. Bolingbroke claimed that despite numerous 'usurpations' of the constitution throughout the history of England, 'the original freedom of the British and Saxon constitution'⁶⁴ remained intact, having been 'preserved' and 'retrieved' by the 'uniformity of spirit'⁶⁵ amongst the English people. Similarly, ancient constitutionalists reinterpreted the Glorious Revolution, seeing it not as a major constitutional change, but as a reaffirmation of the existing rights and liberties of the English people which had been violated by the Stuart kings. Bolingbroke claimed that the accession of William III 'delivered' the English people from 'destruction, from popery and slavery'.⁶⁶ He also claimed it had 'saved the nation'.⁶⁷ Burdett also regarded the Glorious Revolution as having restored and defended the existing English constitution, not as having instituted a new system of government. In May 1821 he claimed that 'the Revolution of 1688 established the liberties of this country'.⁶⁸

Burdett employed historical examples frequently and on a variety of subjects, particularly during his clash with the government in 1810, when presenting his parliamentary reform motions in the Commons,⁶⁹ during his libel trial in 1820 and the during the Catholic emancipation debates.⁷⁰ He believed that 'it strengthens the claim

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² *PD*, Volume XXXVIII, p. 1123. Similarly in May 1817 Burdett claimed that William I was 'falsely called the Conqueror' (Ibid., Volume XXXVI, p. 707).

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ *Remarks on the History of England* (1730), Letter IV. Bolingbroke, *Works 2*, Volume II, p. 157.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ *Reflections on the Present State of the Nation* (1749). Bolingbroke, *Works 1*, Volume IV, p. 128.

⁶⁷ *Letter to Sir William Windham* (1717). Ibid., p. 113.

⁶⁸ *Caledonian Mercury*, 19 May 1821.

⁶⁹ See Chapter 3, Section I.

⁷⁰ See Chapter 2, Section III.

to a man's right, if he can shew that the claim is founded on the practice of remote periods'.⁷¹ Burdett made substantial use of historical examples in 1810 in order to prove that the actions of the House of Commons in imprisoning John Gale Jones were illegal, unconstitutional and unprecedented. In order to prove his point Burdett traced the origins of parliamentary privilege from a law of King Canute, which stated that 'everyone going to or from the Wittena gemotte, should have protection',⁷² through to an entry in the Commons Journal of 1621, which declared that all members of parliament 'ought to have, Freedom of Speech' and 'freedom from all impeachment, imprisonment and molestation'.⁷³ He also listed a number of cases in which parliamentary privilege had been judged to have been breached, dating from 1421 to 1580, noting that in each case members had sought redress through legal channels, they did not 'presume to overleap the bounds of the Constitution, and take the law into their own hands'.⁷⁴ He did not deny the existence of parliamentary privilege, but argued that it was not a power to be used to oppress others. In addition, whenever this principle was infringed in the past it was 'modestly and reasonably maintained by an appeal to the tribunal of the Laws'.⁷⁵ The House did not take it upon itself to act as judge and jury as it had done in the case of Gale Jones, in which the Commons had declared itself above the Law of the Land and

Under false notion of privilege, they were exercising a power, and committing an act of oppression, ill suited to the character of the Guardians of Public Liberty, and destructive of the first and most important object of the constitution, viz. "The Personal Security of the Subject".⁷⁶

In December 1810 Burdett referred to historical examples in order to argue that a Regency was the most constitutional method of dealing with the deficiency in the executive left by George IV's incapacity, remarking

In former periods of our history, in the event of the imprisonment of the

⁷¹ *PD*, Volume XXXVI, p. 707.

⁷² *Burdett to his constituents*, 1810, p. 16.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

reigning monarch, of his being driven out of the kingdom, and in being absent from his dominions, as in the case of Edward 4, in all such cases, the expediency and fitness of the next heir succeeding the Executive Power during such demise could not have been questioned.⁷⁷

At his libel trial in 1820 Burdett also used historical examples to demonstrate that the action taken against himself by the government and against the people assembled at St Peter's Fields was wrong and unconstitutional. Of the events in Manchester Burdett claimed that they were not 'dissimilar to the circumstances which are disclosed in the history of the dreadful massacre at Glencoe'⁷⁸ and noted that 'Even in the reign of Bloody Queen Mary, as is stated by Mr. Justice *Blackstone*, the power of dispersing the people by armed force was considered objectionable'.⁷⁹

Burdett did occasionally refer to natural rights in his speeches. For example, in September 1819 he claimed that the right of assembly was a natural right. At a public meeting held at Palace Yard, Westminster, Burdett claimed that the right of the people to meet and discuss the state of their country was 'one inherent in man - one antecedent to all political institutions, and of which no political institution can justly deprive mankind'.⁸⁰ Also, in the House of Commons in May 1827, when speaking on his decision to support the pro-Catholic Canning administration, Burdett described religious freedom as 'a right of nature' and 'a rational as well as natural right'.⁸¹ However, despite this 'slight and passing allusion to natural rights', Burdett more commonly argued 'on nearer and surer authorities', which during the Emancipation debates focused on 'the specific conventions of the Treaty of Limerick, and the pledge assumed to have been given to Ireland at the time of the Union'.⁸² Burdett also deliberately forged links between his own ideas and those of late seventeenth and eighteenth century thinkers, particularly the neo-Harringtonian and Country

⁷⁷ *CPD*, Volume XVIII, p. 333.

⁷⁸ *State Trials*, p. 36. In 1692 the Scottish Highlanders of Glencoe were massacred for their delay in taking an oath of allegiance to William III.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *The Times*, 3 September 1819.

⁸¹ *PD*, New Series, Volume XVII, p. 413.

⁸² *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, Volume XXIV (London, 1828), p. 820.

ideologues. In a letter to Earl Stanhope in January 1799 Burdett mentions ‘the glorious names’ of Milton, Locke and Sidney.⁸³ Also, speaking on the subject of ‘Public Liberty’, Burdett remarked ‘the genius of a Harrington has left us scarcely anything to desire upon the subject’, as he treats it so ‘ably’ and ‘eloquently’.⁸⁴ In 1818 Burdett co-founded a club to organise constitutional agitation for parliamentary reform, which ‘was called, after Harrington’s Club, the Rota’.⁸⁵ The pamphlet edition of Burdett’s parliamentary speech in defence of Gale Jones in 1810 contains a lengthy extract from Blackstone’s *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765). Burdett also refers the reader to the arguments of several legal and constitutional writers and thinkers, notably Lord Coke, Hatsell, Plowden, Fortescue and Blackstone, thus placing his argument within the established constitutional tradition, and giving his ideas credibility. At his libel trial in 1820 Burdett quoted from, amongst others, Blackstone and Bolingbroke.⁸⁶ In July 1819 Burdett clearly linked his own ideas with the Country opposition of the early eighteenth century when he declared ‘the principles of those who were called the Tories in the reign of Queen Anne, form the substance of my political creed’.⁸⁷

Another central theme of Burdett’s constitutional beliefs and those of the neo-Harringtonian and Country Thinkers was the idea that the House of Commons, or more specifically the party or ‘faction’ in power, had usurped the powers of the Crown and had thus upset the balance of the constitution in their favour. Eighteenth century constitutional thinkers saw the English constitution as one of balance, wherein the powers of each of the three branches, although not completely independent of one another, were divided and their privileges distinct. In *Remarks on the History of England* Bolingbroke claimed that in England there existed a system of ‘constitutional

⁸³ Bod., Burdett-Coutts Papers, MSS 39455, folio 78. Burdett to Lord Stanhope, 24 January 1799.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ *Broughton’s Recollections*, Volume II, p. 114. Harrington had founded the Rota Club, or Coffee Club, in November 1659 as a forum to debate the ideas contained in his *The Commonwealth of Oceana* (1656), which argued that political power should be derived from the consent of the governed and advocated a constitutional republic, religious freedom for all (including Jews and Catholics), the ballot, and the rotation of political offices. Amongst the members of Burdett’s Rota Club were radical Whig Sir Robert Wilson, Lord Byron, society dandy Scrope Davies, and law reformer Henry Bickersteth.

⁸⁶ *State Trials*, p. 41.

dependency', by which 'the proceedings of each part of the government, when they come forth into action and affect the whole are liable to be examined and controlled by the other parts'.⁸⁸ This was combined with a 'mutual independency', wherein 'the resolutions of each part, which direct their proceedings, be taken independently, and without any influence, direct, or indirect, on the others'.⁸⁹ Thus, although each branch had separate and distinct powers, the king as 'supreme magistrate ... entrusted with the executive power and several other powers and privileges, which we call prerogatives',⁹⁰ the Lords as 'supreme judicature',⁹¹ and the Commons as 'grand inquest of the nation' and controllers of national expenses and supply,⁹² they also had overlapping powers, for example, the king had 'a negative voice in the legislature'⁹³ and depended upon parliament for finance, while both the Lords and the Commons were responsible for preparing, passing, or refusing to pass bills. Each branch was also responsible for supervising the other two branches, and taking action against them if they assumed powers not within their jurisdiction, or used their powers illegally. The safety and security of the English constitution was dependent upon this delicate balance being maintained. Bolingbroke argued that 'this division of power, and these distinct privileges, constitute and maintain our government ... confusion of them tends to destroy it'.⁹⁴ Burdett adhered to this view, regarding the English constitution as one wherein power and responsibility were shared equally between the King, Lords and Commons, but in which the individual powers and responsibilities of those three branches remained separate and distinct. At a Westminster meeting in March 1809 Burdett remarked that the English constitution was 'like a partnership concern. There are three partners; the King, the Lords, and the Commons'.⁹⁵ In December 1810 he claimed that the 'parts of the constitution' were 'distinct in

⁸⁷ *PD*, Volume XL, p. 1455.

⁸⁸ *Remarks on the History of England* (1730), Letter VII. Bolingbroke, *Works* 2, Volume II, p. 190-1.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 189-90.

⁹⁵ *Cobbett's Weekly Political Register*, 8 April 1809.

themselves, however united or mingled in their joint co-operation'.⁹⁶ Like Bolingbroke, Burdett believed that the maintenance of the delicate balance was integral to the security and safety of the constitution and that any 'confusion' of these powers would be damaging to liberty. In 1810 he wrote to his constituents

It is universally admitted by all writers upon the science of Government, that the legislative, executive and judicial powers in a state should be kept distinct; the monster Despotism is generated by their union; and that Justice and Liberty are promoted and assured by these powers being kept distinct.⁹⁷

The seventeenth century was blighted by the struggles for power between the Stuart Kings and their parliaments. The power of the commons had slowly increased since the early Tudor period, which saw the decline in influence of the nobility during the reign of Henry VII and the church in the reign of Henry VIII. During the reign of James I, parliament and the crown were frequently at loggerheads, particularly over fiscal and religious policy. This continued under Charles I, culminating in the Civil War, the execution of the king and the Commonwealth. During this period, the balance of power shifted in favour of the commons, arguably in order to save the people from monarchical absolutism. After the restoration, the difficulties between the king and parliament continued. It was not until after the abdication of James II that any real attempt was made to define the relationship between king and parliament. The Declaration of Right (1688) accepted by William and Mary, the Bill of Rights (1689), the Triennial Act (1694), the Act of Settlement (1701), and the Act of Union with Scotland (1707), all contained clauses which outlined the powers and responsibilities of parliament and the king, both in terms of their relationship with one another and with the people. Balance had seemingly been restored, and safeguards put in place against monarchical absolutism. However, for some the spectre of monarchical absolutism had merely been replaced with another type of absolutism; that of the House of Commons. As the eighteenth century progressed, the power of

⁹⁶ *CPD*, Volume XVIII, p. 333.

⁹⁷ *Burdett to his constituents*, 1810, p. 38.

the Commons, and particularly the ruling party within the House, had increased at the expense of the power of the Crown. Not only did the king depend upon parliament for much of his finance, parliament also and took control of some the pensions within the gift of the Crown. The development of the Cabinet, from an *ad hoc* body presided over by the king into a permanent body outside of royal control, and the emergence of a Prime Minister in the 1730s also acted as constraints on royal power. Bolingbroke believed that since the Glorious Revolution, the government of England had drifted into oligarchical rule, under the control of Walpole and his followers, who had abused the royal prerogative. Thus, while the Revolution had ‘saved the nation’, it had also ‘ruined the king’.⁹⁸ This also had a damaging impact on the people, as the ruling party focused on ‘enriching themselves’ and of ‘establishing their dominion’, all the while ‘impoverishing the rest of the nation’.⁹⁹ Burdett certainly shared this view. He frequently accused the ‘*Borough Monger Faction*’¹⁰⁰ of encroaching upon and abusing the royal prerogative, thus upsetting the balance of the constitution and driving the country into tyranny. In June 1809 Burdett claimed that ‘157 Borough-mongers ... have TRAITEROUSLY usurped all but the pageantry and outward shew and forms of Royalty’¹⁰¹ and that in doing so they had made the king ‘more like a Rope Dancer’.¹⁰² In April 1810 Burdett criticised the Commons for assuming ‘the power of a King’,¹⁰³ while in July 1812 he declared that the ‘boroughmonger faction’ had ‘erected itself into an odious oligarchy, and usurped all the powers of the three branches of the constitution’ and claimed that ‘In this cause most of our evils originated’.¹⁰⁴

Burdett believed that the roots of the Commons’s subversion of the powers of the Crown were to be found during the reign of Charles I, when the Long Parliament was forced to assume powers that it did not legally possess in order to defend the country

⁹⁸ *A Letter to Sir William Windham* (1717). Bolingbroke, *Works 1*, Volume IV, p. 113

⁹⁹ *On the Spirit of Patriotism* (1736). Bolingbroke, *Works 2*, Volume IV, p. 195.

¹⁰⁰ *CPD*, Volume XIV, p. 1046. Burdett used the term ‘borough-monger faction’ regularly in order to describe ministers and their supporters.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1051.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 1052.

¹⁰³ *CPD*, Volume XVI, p. 550.

from the despotism of the King. It was a unique set of circumstances and there, surely, are not sources sufficiently clear, nor times sufficiently analogous to justify our drawing thence instances, miscalled Precedents, to countenance similar proceedings under a legal, settled and established system of government.¹⁰⁵

Burdett believed that before the Long Parliament, Members of Parliament had respect for the rights and liberties of others and did not suppose themselves above the law or the king. But, by getting rid of the House of Lords and beheading the King, the House of Commons went from being 'the inferior branch of the legislature'¹⁰⁶ to forming the entire representation of the country. After the Restoration in 1660 and 'the return of order and the laws',¹⁰⁷ the House of Commons was unwilling to give up the power that it had usurped from the Crown. Burdett believed that the Revolution of 1688/9, though grounded on firm and constitutional principles, had since been subverted by a small group of 'borough-mongers' who abused the royal prerogative and controlled parliament through corruption. In June 1809 he claimed that it was during the 'era of the Revolution' that 'the seeds of this Rotten-borough System ... were with woeful prodigality first scattered over the land' and that since then it had 'grown so luxuriantly and have produced such poisonous effects'.¹⁰⁸ Burdett celebrated the Bill of Rights but noted that in practice it did not live up to its promise.

The people at the revolution got a good bill of fare but no dinner though the bill declared against all unusual and cruel punishments, against packing juries, and packing parliaments, against standing armies in times of peace, against corrupt interference in elections, and that elections ought to be free, yet no provisions were made to carry these declarations into effect, and to some of them a few words were added, which deprived the people of all benefit which might have been derived from them. These magical words were "without consent or grant of

¹⁰⁴ *PD*, Volume XXIII, p. 1265.

¹⁰⁵ *Burdett to his constituents*, 1810.

¹⁰⁶ *CPD*, Volume XVI, p. 15

¹⁰⁷ *Burdett to his constituents*, 1810.

¹⁰⁸ *CPD*, Volume XIV, p. 1047.

parliament,” or “unless it be with the consent of parliament” by the application of these few words, as with the touch of a magicians wand, the fabrick vanished into thin air.¹⁰⁹

In Burdett’s view, parliament, particularly the House of Commons, which was under the control of an ‘oligarchy of rotten borough mongers’,¹¹⁰ was to entirely to blame for this subversion of the principles of the Revolution and all of the subsequent measures that had been destructive to liberty. In July 1810 he told the House ‘He could see in that room the root of all the evil. Here was the root, and the branches spread over, and extended to every extremity of the country’.¹¹¹ In July 1817 he blamed the ‘usurping House of Commons’ for the ‘most outrageous’ Septennial Act, which he described as ‘the greatest outrage ever offered to public freedom’, ‘a contempt of national rights’ and a ‘monstrous subversion of the rights of Englishmen’.¹¹²

For Burdett, the absolutism of the Commons was far more threatening to the rights and liberties of the English people than any threat posed by the Crown. In June 1809 he talked of ‘Having no dread of the Prerogative of the Crown’ as it ‘forms part of the law of the land, and is material and necessary to maintain the Constitution’.¹¹³ He did, however, claim that he feared the abuse of this ‘*legitimate Prerogative, by the Borough Monger Faction, and the consequent abuse of it by the agents of that Faction*’.¹¹⁴ At a dinner to celebrate his release from the Tower in 1810, Burdett informed the people that they had nothing to fear from the King; it was the borough-mongering faction, who had usurped the King’s sovereignty, who were the enemy. It was they who abused the powers of the King for their own personal gain, against the interests of the country. It was they who had passed a series of measures damaging to liberty. The balance of the constitution had been upset, resulting in a ‘system of terror’, wherein the ‘safeguards of personal liberty’ had been removed by

¹⁰⁹ *PD*, Volume XXXVIII, p. 1128-9.

¹¹⁰ *CPD*, Volume XXI, p. 21.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, Volume XV, p. 122.

¹¹² *PD*, Volume XL, p. 1453.

¹¹³ *CPD*, Volume XIV, p. 1046.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

the 'agents of that rapacious and haughty oligarchy'.¹¹⁵ During the debates over the Regency in December 1810 Burdett fiercely opposed any scheme which would lead to either parliament or the ministry filling the constitutional void left by the incapacity of the King, and would thus further upset the delicate balance of the constitution. He declared he was unsure 'as to the right or the power of the two Houses of parliament to supply any deficiency in the executive',¹¹⁶ and argued that a Regency was 'more constitutional'.¹¹⁷ Burdett also claimed that attempts by the 'oligarchical House of Commons' to set themselves up as an executive in the King's absence were 'a mortal stab at the constitution of the country',¹¹⁸ and 'a complete subversion and usurpation of the Crown'.¹¹⁹

Burdett believed that ministers drove a wedge between the King and his people so that their abuse of royal power would go unchallenged. In June 1809 he criticised 'The *Borough-mongers*' for being

equally hostile to King and People, misrepresenting one to the other, filling the mind of one with jealousy, the ears of the other with alarm, which, by perpetuating discord, reigns sole arbiter of the strife, and establishes its ignominious dominion over both.¹²⁰

Burdett believed that this estrangement between the crown and the people actually placed the country in danger. In January 1819 he claimed,

Kings were too much exposed to have adulation poured into their ear. It was the cause of the overthrow of too many of the thrones in Europe. We had not heard that any of the kings who had of late years fallen under the dominion of Buonaparté, were in want of courtiers. It was fit that the king of England should occasionally hear the truth from his commons.¹²¹

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Volume XVIII, p. 103.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 333.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 267.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 336.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, Volume XIV, p. 1049.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, Volume XII, p. 237.

These sentiments can be regarded as Burdett's own interpretation of the 'evil counsellors' idea, which was a traditional way of indirectly and safely attacking the King. During the eighteenth century it was employed by the opposition, whose position was not formally recognised by the constitution and who were vulnerable to accusations of Jacobitism for speaking out against the king and his ministers. By blaming the King's ministers or other members of the Royal family for any problems, opponents of the regime were defending themselves against possible accusations of high treason. Bolingbroke employs the tactic in *The Idea of A Patriot King* (1749) when he argued that Kings are, from the cradle, bred to regard themselves as superior to all other men, and it is this that 'trains up kings to be tyrants, without knowing that they are so'.¹²² In essence, the use of such an attack can be seen as cloaked Republicanism. However, Burdett, like Bolingbroke, who declared 'I esteem monarchy above any other form of government',¹²³ was no Republican. Burdett described himself a 'dutiful subject' who had 'taken an oath of allegiance to the King to obey his laws'.¹²⁴ In 1820 he noted that 'In every speech I uttered, either in or out of Parliament, at public meetings, or on the hustings, I have uniformly shown and recommended proper respect for the Royal Family'.¹²⁵ Besides, opposition to a king or his ministers on specific issues of policy was not indicative of any opposition to the monarchy itself.

Burdett saw the monarchy as an important, legitimate, and valuable part of the British Constitution and regarded 'the Prerogative of the Crown' as 'an ingredient in the Constitution ... essential to its existence'.¹²⁶ His only criticism of the monarchy was the corruption exercised by individual members of the Royal family, because of the disrepute and potential damage it brought to the monarchy as an institution. Burdett believed that the king should be the epitome of moral virtue, an example to his people. He regarded this as an important constitutional defence, as corruption had weakened

¹²² *Patriot King*, p. 22.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹²⁴ *CPD*, Volume XVI, p. 550.

¹²⁵ *State Trials*, p. 44.

¹²⁶ *CPD*, Volume XIV, p. 1047.

the French monarchy, resulting in revolution, and had also plagued the monarchies of the other continental nations invaded by Napoleon. Burdett believed that the monarchy's greatest strength lay in its assured place in the hearts of the people. In 1799, for example, he claimed that 'The Throne was armed, not with terrors against the subject, but with the affections of the people'.¹²⁷ Any involvement in immorality or corruption jeopardised the standing of the monarchy among the people, and therefore endangered the country. In January 1812 Burdett remarked that 'While the debts of the Civil List had been encreasing, the splendour of the throne had been diminishing'.¹²⁸ Bolingbroke also believed that the moral conduct of the King was of the utmost importance. Throughout *The Idea of a Patriot King* he expressed the idea that a king should live virtuously as an example to his people. He should root out corruption and prevent his subjects from falling into sin: 'A man of sense and virtue both will not fall into any great impropriety of character, or indecency of conduct'.¹²⁹ It is interesting to note that both Burdett's and Bolingbroke's ideal monarch was Elizabeth I. Bolingbroke devoted several letters in his *Remarks on the History of England* to celebrating Elizabeth's reign, which he described as being one of 'great glory and happiness'.¹³⁰ He believed that 'the excellency of our constitution' was 'settled about the time of queen Elizabeth'.¹³¹ Elizabeth, whom Bolingbroke described as having 'extensive knowledge' and 'superior genius',¹³² was the only English monarch who came close to his ideal 'Patriot King' because she won the hearts of her people and acted in their best interests not those of a particular party or faction. Burdett also celebrated Elizabeth, describing her as a 'wise queen'¹³³ and calling her reign 'brilliant'.¹³⁴ During his speech on parliamentary reform in May 1817 Burdett claimed that the 'wisdom' of Elizabeth's government 'transcends all praise'.¹³⁵ Again in July 1819 Burdett described Elizabeth as an 'exemplary

¹²⁷ *PR*, 3rd Series, Volume IX, p. 54.

¹²⁸ *CPD*, Volume XXI, p. 274.

¹²⁹ *Patriot King*, p. 73.

¹³⁰ *Remarks on the History of England* (1730), Letter XI. Bolingbroke, *Works* 2, Volume II, p. 234.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, Letter XII, p. 247.

¹³² *Ibid.*, Letter VIII, p. 197.

¹³³ *CPD*, Volume XXI, p. 1246.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1245.

¹³⁵ *PD*, Volume XXXVI, p. 710.

sovereign', whose reign should be remembered with 'sentiments of pride, and fondness, and veneration'.¹³⁶

Burdett's grievance with the House of Commons was based upon his disapproval of the corruption and abuse exercised by its members, rather than being an opposition to the institution itself. In June 1797 he remarked 'It is not Ministers that I wish to oppose! It is corruption that I wish to destroy!'¹³⁷ Similarly, in 1804 he declared, 'Towards the constitutional part of the House of Commons, no man has a greater esteem than myself. I esteem, I venerate, I revere it'.¹³⁸ The corruption of parliament, particularly the House of Commons, was a criticism frequently levelled by opposition politicians. During the eighteenth century government expenditure, bureaucracy, taxation and the number of placemen and pensioners sitting in the House had all increased. Political participation, meanwhile, had decreased as a result of the Septennial Act (1716), which more than doubled the maximum life of a parliament from three to seven years. In addition to this, a new political interest began to grow in power and influence, that of merchants and other 'moneyed' men. Extensive borrowing in the eighteenth century ensured that the government was indebted to these men. Consequently, it was feared that they would pursue measures in the interests of moneyed men rather than doing what best served the country. Walpole's opponents argued that these developments reduced the number of independent country gentlemen in the Commons, men who had a stake in the country and thus had its best interests at heart, replacing them instead with 'moneyed' men, who sought only profit and could easily be bought by the government. This severely compromised the independence of the House. Neo-Harringtonian and Country thinkers regarded the independence of parliament as fundamental to liberty. Bolingbroke, for example, claimed that 'the preservation of publick freedom depends on the preservation of parliamentary freedom'¹³⁹ and believed that in his own day 'this necessary, independency of parliaments, in which the essence of our constitution, and by

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, Volume XL, p. 1450.

¹³⁷ *PR*, 3rd Series, Volume II, p. 610.

¹³⁸ *Middlesex Election 1804*, p. 30.

¹³⁹ *A Dissertation Upon Parties* (1735), Letter XI. Bolingbroke, *Works* 2, Volume III, p. 172.

consequence our liberty consists, seems to be in great, not to say, in imminent danger of being lost'.¹⁴⁰ Burdett regarded the corruption exercised within the House of Commons, in the form of sinecures, reversions, and pensions, as the means by which the government secured the passage of measures destructive to liberty and were able to continue their policy of high taxation. In July 1812 he estimated that sinecure and pension payments 'Amongst which ought not be paid' had cost the country £952,684 in 1810¹⁴¹ and claimed that 'the persons who possess, and those who aspire to the offices of the state, no longer regard themselves as chosen by the sovereign, but as the nominees of the borough oligarchy'.¹⁴² Burdett wanted to expel all placemen and pensioners from the House by re-enacting the clause in the Act of Settlement (1701) which stated that no one who had office of place or profit under the Crown, or who was in receipt of a pension from the Crown, could sit in the Commons. An amendment in 1705 declared that any MP appointed to office should vacate his seat and stand for re-election. However, the abundance of rotten and pocket boroughs ensured that this did little to regulate corruption or reduce the numbers of placemen in the House. Burdett claimed that this 'limitation' had 'done away with our new Magna Carta'.¹⁴³

Bolingbroke believed that party or 'faction' lay at the root of this parliamentary corruption. He regarded parties as 'a political evil'¹⁴⁴ and claimed that they had 'brought even the fundamental principles of our constitution into question' and 'liberty to the brink of ruin'.¹⁴⁵ This was because the interests of the members of parties or 'factions' were those of their party and not of the state, consequently they did not serve in the interests of the people whom they represented but the interests of their party, on whom they depended for their place in government and often their seat in the House. Burdett also took a dim view of party politics, believing that it

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, Letter XVIII, p. 277.

¹⁴¹ *Bod.*, Burdett-Coutts Papers, MSS 39961, folio 19. This document is undated but it forms the notes for a speech Burdett delivered in the House of Commons on 28 July 1812. See *CPD*, Volume XXIII, pp. 1262-1272.

¹⁴² *PD*, Volume XXIII, p. 1287-8.

¹⁴³ *Bod.*, Burdett-Coutts Papers, MSS 39467, folio 52. This document is undated.

¹⁴⁴ *Patriot King*, p. 46.

compromised the independence of members and encouraged the growth of corruption. In 1797 he is said to have composed a poem in which he compared the parties in the Commons to thieves squabbling over their spoils.¹⁴⁶ In February 1813, when discussing the constitutional impact of the Regency Crisis of 1788, Burdett complained of the 'violence of faction' and criticised Pitt's ministry for having 'no other view than to keep power'.¹⁴⁷ He also claimed that they acted 'without any regard to the interests of the state'.¹⁴⁸ In May 1809 Burdett claimed that 'He would not join any faction: but he would be glad to support any minister who acted properly'.¹⁴⁹ Similarly, in February 1810 he declared that he 'was not averse from party in all its shapes' and would be perfectly willing to support a party 'founded on public ground, and with a view to public good'.¹⁵⁰ He could not, however, support any party 'founded upon self-interest and directed only to the attainment of place and pension' because they were 'calculated to ruin the country'.¹⁵¹ Throughout his career Burdett followed these principles. For much of his early career Burdett was closely allied with the Whigs, as the only alternative to the self-serving and corrupt Tory administration which had governed the country for decades. In 1827 he was prepared to support the Tory administrations of Canning and Goderich, seeing them as the best hope of securing the passage of the Catholic Emancipation Bill¹⁵² and in the early 1830s he again supported the Whigs, who were now in power, hoping that they would enact reforms beneficial to the country. Yet, Burdett remained determined to be independent and opposed to the idea of parties. In the House of Commons in July 1819, when speaking on the differences between Whig and Tory attitudes to the royal prerogative, he remarked that he wished 'absurd party distinctions were buried in oblivion for ever'.¹⁵³ In a speech to the electors of Westminster in 1835 Burdett stated 'As to Whigs and Tories, I beg leave to say, I have the greatest regard and

¹⁴⁵ *A Dissertation Upon Parties* (1735), Introduction. Bolingbroke, *Works* 2, Volume III, p. 4.

¹⁴⁶ See Appendix 7.

¹⁴⁷ *PD*, Volume XXIV, p. 707.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ *CPD*, Volume XIV, p. 730.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, Volume XVI, p. 455.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² See Chapter 2, Section III.

¹⁵³ *PD*, Volume XL, p. 1455.

friendship for many of both denominations, and no regard for either as a party'.¹⁵⁴ In October 1836 Burdett complained of 'The narrow-minded, illiberal & not less base spirit of Party, which in these our days poisons every transaction public or private',¹⁵⁵ and also referred to the 'odious party spirit'.¹⁵⁶ Given his opinion on parties and their effect on the independence of members it seems all the more remarkable that in 1837 Burdett was elected as the Conservative member for North Wiltshire. However, at the time, the policies of Sir Robert Peel were consistent with his own beliefs and represented to Burdett the only means of preserving the constitution and saving the country, which at this time he believed was under threat from the Whig-O'Connellite alliance then governing the country.¹⁵⁷

Burdett jealously guarded his independence, believing it to be inextricably linked to his position as a country gentleman. At no stage in his career did he seek political office and he twice declined the offer of elevation to the Lords. In 1827 Burdett was offered a peerage by Canning, but he turned it down, explaining to his fellow MP at Westminster John Cam Hobhouse that

he never had had but one passion, that of serving the public in his own station. That this passion was now stronger with him than ever ... to become a peer would render him powerless in comparison with his present means of utility, and would besides be so little intelligible generally as to do mischief to the public cause.¹⁵⁸

Burdett also rejected Grey's offer of a peerage in 1831 because he believed 'it is in the House of Commons ... I have the greatest chance of being serviceable' and 'by keeping my place in the House of Commons, I might possibly be of some use'.¹⁵⁹ He saw country gentlemen like himself as the guardians of the constitution and the protectors of liberty. It was their 'natural position' to 'stand forward in length in

¹⁵⁴ *Sir Francis Burdett to the Independent Electors of Westminster*, November 1835.

¹⁵⁵ Bod., Burdett-Coutts Papers, MSS 39455, folio 8. Burdett to unknown recipient, 23 October 1836.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ See Chapter 2, section IV for a more in depth analysis of Burdett's reasons for joining the Conservative party.

¹⁵⁸ *Brougham's Recollections*, Volume III, p. 210.

¹⁵⁹ Bod., Burdett-Coutts Papers, MSS 39454, folio 123. Burdett to Lord Grey, 6 September 1831.

defence of the rights of the people at large'.¹⁶⁰ It was their duty to take up seats in the House of Commons and speak against the corruption of the government and their subversion of the constitution. Burdett believed it was 'the true policy' of the 'Gentry of the Country' and 'the line of conduct chalked out for them by honour & interest ... to stand foremost in defence of the Just rights of the People'.¹⁶¹ Thus, their independence and freedom from party ties was essential in order that they could properly fulfil their duties. He regularly called upon country gentlemen to exert themselves to defend liberty. In January 1798 he encouraged country gentlemen to

stand forward at length in support of their country let them exert the high privilege to which they were born, and not basely to become the tools and minions of that Government it is their province to control let them, in the wise spirit of their ancestors, demand in their turn that grievances be redressed, and, by bringing down vengeance on the head of the Minister who has brought all this ruin on us, prove to the people of England, that their Constitution is not a dead letter.¹⁶²

In May 1809 Burdett declared that he wished to see 'the Gentlemen of England ... heading the people in defence of their rights and liberties'.¹⁶³ In his letter condemning the Peterloo Massacre in August 1819 Burdett also called upon the landed gentry to do their duty and take action to defend the liberties of the people:

Will the gentlemen of England support or wink at such proceedings? They have a great stake in their country; they hold great estates, and they are bound in duty and in honour to consider them as retaining fees on the part of their country, for upholding its rights and liberties; surely they will at length awake, and find they have duties to perform. They can never stand tamely by as lookers-on, whilst bloody Neros rip open their mother's womb; they must join the general voice, loudly demanding justice and redress; and head Public Meetings throughout the United Kingdom, to put a stop in its commencement to a reign of terror

¹⁶⁰ *PR*, 3rd Series, Volume XVIII, p. 20.

¹⁶¹ *Bod.*, Burdett-Coutts Papers, MSS 39455, folio 78. Burdett to Lord Stanhope, 24 January 1799.

¹⁶² *PR*, 3rd Series, Volume IV, p. 539.

¹⁶³ *Parliamentary Reform*, 1809, p. 12.

and blood.¹⁶⁴

At his libel trial in March 1820 he declared that the 'gentlemen of England' were 'the guardians of the Constitution'¹⁶⁵ and remarked that it was their duty 'to use their efforts to preserve the constitution of the country, when they found it had in the slightest degree been assailed'.¹⁶⁶

The concept that the landed gentry were the natural defenders of the constitution was a neo-Harringtonian and Country idea. In one of the first neo-Harringtonian tracts, *A Letter from a Person of Quality to a Friend in the Country* (1675), the landed aristocracy were presented as the safeguard against military and arbitrary government, which it was claimed were established 'by the same steps that the nobility were lessened'.¹⁶⁷ The letter was produced by Anthony Ashley Cooper, the first earl of Shaftesbury,¹⁶⁸ in response to a parliamentary bill entitled 'An Act to prevent the Dangers which arise from Persons disaffected to the Government',¹⁶⁹ which required all office holders to take an oath declaring it unlawful to 'take up arms against the King ... or against those that are commissioned by him'.¹⁷⁰ It was feared that the second part of this oath would allow the King and his ministers to seize the lands of any political opponent by armed force, without the landowner being able to legally resist them. This was regarded as extremely damaging to liberty as it 'alters the whole law of England, in the most essential and fundamental parts of it; and makes the whole law of property to become arbitrary, and without effect whenever the king pleases'.¹⁷¹ Bolingbroke also believed that men of breeding and status, meaning those with land and titles, were the natural political leaders, believing that the degeneration of politics under Walpole was the result of the rise of moneyed men. The rise of such

¹⁶⁴ *Sir Francis Burdett to the Electors of Westminster*, August 22 1819.

¹⁶⁵ *State Trials*, p. 44.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ Locke, J., *The Works of John Locke, in Nine Volumes* (9 Vols., London, 1824), Volume IX, p. 242.

¹⁶⁸ The work is believed to have been written by Shaftesbury. However, it is often attributed to John Locke and is included amongst his works because of the help he is believed to have given Shaftesbury in its composition. Also, many of the ideas contained within the work were repeated in Locke's *Second Treatise of Government* (1690).

¹⁶⁹ Locke, *op. cit.*, p. 200.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 213.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 225.

men to power had, in Bolingbroke's view, upset the political order as men who had no stake in the country in the form of land were at its helm. He believed that new financial institutions threatened independence. Bolingbroke supported the Tory Landed Qualification Act of 1711,¹⁷² which established a land qualification of £600 per annum for county members and £300 per annum for borough members, in order to preserve the freedom of parliament from the royal prerogative and to prevent an influx of 'moneyed' men into the House. Burdett also believed that political power should lie firmly in land, steadfastly resisting any measures that would affect the property rights of the landed gentry. In May 1798 Burdett objected to the proposed Land-Sale Tax, claiming that it would upset the status quo as the landholder would be 'unable to keep his place in society - while new men, who grow in wealth as the country declines, are every day rising around him'.¹⁷³ Burdett also talked of the distinction between the 'landed and monied interests'¹⁷⁴ and remarked that 'It would be well if gentlemen looked a little more to their own interest; for that is the best way of securing the interest of the public'.¹⁷⁵ In 1804 Burdett explained the importance of the link between land ownership and independence to his father-in-law Thomas Coutts, writing 'I should never think of parting with land ... land is best for a man who places his supreme good in leisure, liberty and command of his own time, which are my Penates or household Gods'.¹⁷⁶ In the Commons in March 1829, quoting 'the words of a great writer, Harrington', Burdett remarked 'that there was something in the leading of armies, and the government of states, which was the peculiar business of gentlemen'.¹⁷⁷

Another important neo-Harringtonian/Country belief borrowed by Burdett was an aversion to the maintenance of a permanent military force. In the late seventeenth century opposition to the standing army was common, mainly as a response to the

¹⁷² Kramnick remarks that Bolingbroke 'championed the Bill in the Commons' (Kramnick, I., *Bolingbroke and His Circle: The Politics of Nostalgia in the Age of Walpole* (Massachusetts, 1968), p. 13).

¹⁷³ *PR*, 3rd Series, Volume VI, p. 243-4.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ Patterson, *Burdett*, Volume I, p. 155.

harsh military rule of the Cromwellian period, but also because it was feared that it might be used by the King against his people in order to establish arbitrary government. In Shaftesbury's *A Letter from a Person of Quality to his Friend in the Country* the maintenance of a standing army was presented as damaging to liberty, as it created an imbalance between the armed state and unarmed civilians, effectively allowing the King and his ministers to abuse their position unchallenged. It was claimed that the 1661 Militia Act, which established the King as the sole head of the armed forces, had 'establisheth a standing army by a law, and swears us into a military government'.¹⁷⁸ This opposition continued well into the eighteenth century. After the Glorious Revolution, control of the army was placed in the hands of parliament, who regulated its size and discipline through an annual Mutiny Act. William III's wars with France saw the mobilisation of an enormous standing army, which remained after the conclusion of peace in 1697. Country and neo-Harringtonian thinkers objected to this for three main reasons: cost, corruption and political danger. A large army was enormously expensive to maintain and required high levels of taxation in order to meet the costs, it also required the appointment and promotion of large numbers of military officers and civilian administrators, as well as a large number of merchant contractors in order to supply troops. This increased the opportunities for corruption and for the government to increase its influence in parliament, particularly as military officers, administrators and suppliers were eligible for parliamentary seats and depended upon the government for promotion and employment. It was also feared that the army might be used as an instrument of tyranny at home.

Bolingbroke strongly opposed the maintenance of a permanent military force, believing it to be 'incompatible with publick liberty'.¹⁷⁹ He regarded it as the 'wicked policy' of 'enemies of the constitution'.¹⁸⁰ Bolingbroke's objection was based on his belief that a standing army established 'a tyrannical power in the king or in the

¹⁷⁷ *PD*, New Series, Volume XX, p. 1065.

¹⁷⁸ Locke, *op. cit.*, p. 202.

¹⁷⁹ *A Dissertation Upon Parties* (1735), Letter I. Bolingbroke, *Works* 2, Volume III, p. 46.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

ministers'.¹⁸¹ It was the means by which bad monarchs who had no respect for the liberties of the people governed, for in the reigns of those monarchs who valued liberty, standing armies were absent. Bolingbroke questioned the reason why a standing army was necessary, remarking 'If they are kept for shew, they are ridiculous; if they are kept for any other purpose whatever, they are too dangerous to be suffered'.¹⁸² He believed that 'all standing armies, for whatsoever purpose instituted, or in whatsoever habit clothed, may be easily made the instruments of faction'.¹⁸³ His reason for this was the estrangement between the army and the rest of society. He noted that 'a body of men separated in many respects from the rest of the nation, constrained to different customs, and in some measure subjected to different laws, may be easily persuaded, that they may have a different interest'.¹⁸⁴ Burdett had a strikingly similar attitude. He regarded the existence of a standing army and the quartering of troops in barracks as detrimental to liberty, as he felt that the harsh discipline exercised within barracks estranged soldiers from the people and made it easier for the government to use the army against the very people it was their job to protect. The maintenance of a standing army was something that Burdett denounced regularly. To the House of Commons in June 1808 he declared 'He did not think that we ought to trust for our defence to a standing army alone, after having seen it fail in so many instances in other countries'.¹⁸⁵ At a reform meeting in May 1809 he declared standing armies to be 'dangerous to the public' and 'ineffectual as a defence of the country'.¹⁸⁶ In January 1812 Burdett claimed that 'the whole land was in a state of terror' because 'Military possession was taken of the country; depôts, and barracks, and fortifications, were formed'.¹⁸⁷ In May of the same year, during debates in the Commons over estimates for building army barracks, Burdett claimed that the proposals for a Horse Guards barrack in Regent's Park was an attempt by the government to overawe the city. On 1 July 1819 Burdett condemned the 'monstrous

¹⁸¹ *Patriot King*, p. 70.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 71.

¹⁸³ *Remarks on the History of England (1730)*, Bolingbroke, Works 2, Volume II, p. 206.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ *CPD*, Volume XI, p. 854.

¹⁸⁶ *Parliamentary Reform, 1809*, p. 7.

¹⁸⁷ *CPD*, Volume XXI, p. 22.

unconstitutional standing army'¹⁸⁸ claiming it existed only for the purpose 'to support the corrupt majority of this House in their usurpation' of the people's liberties.¹⁸⁹ Burdett's negative attitude towards the army is evident from his reaction to his son's entry into the forces in 1815, which he regarded as 'most embarrassing'.¹⁹⁰ Burdett's steward Richard Crabtree wrote that Robert's choice of profession was 'impolite and improper in every bearing of [Burdett's] mind'¹⁹¹. Burdett himself declared that he would 'as soon seen [Robert] dead as in the Army'.¹⁹²

The neo-Harringtonian/Country alternative to standing armies was the militia, an ancient institution whereby the responsibility for defence was to be placed in the hands of local, independent gentlemen, administered on a county by county basis, with no threat to public liberty and no strain on the public purse. This was regarded as the ultimate display of independence and exercise of it; the citizen appearing in public with his own arms to defend a cause that was that of the commonwealth. The militia were celebrated as public-spirited men, as opposed to the mercenary-like army, who were motivated by money not by love of their country. Burdett agreed with this notion, describing the militia as 'the sole constitutional force of the country'.¹⁹³ He believed that a nation defended by these 'citizen-soldiers' would be 'invincible'.¹⁹⁴ In May 1809 Burdett was clear about his preference for a militia over a standing army, remarking that he would like to see the defence of the country

Entrusted only to its own people - I wish to see it entrusted to the honest farmer - to country gentlemen - to tradesmen - I wish that the inhabitants of town, and the country in general, had arms in their hands, for the purpose of resisting the invader - I should like to see that sort of force, instead of a miserable, weak, contemptible, defence, such as is at best

¹⁸⁸ *PD*, Volume XL, p. 1452.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1462.

¹⁹⁰ Wiltshire and Swindon Record Office, 1883/188, Burdett and Jones Family Papers. Sir Francis Burdett to William Jones Burdett, c. 1815.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, Richard Crabtree to Sir Francis Burdett, c. 1815.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, Burdett to Richard Crabtree, 30 August 1815.

¹⁹³ *CPD*, Volume XXI, p. 29.

¹⁹⁴ *PR*, 3rd Series, Volume XVIII, p. 12.

ineffectually obtained by a standing army.¹⁹⁵

Burdett believed that the militia was best way of securing the country from foreign invasion, claiming in April 1808 that ‘an armed people, proud of, and devoted to liberty, was the only method of making a country unconquerable, and a government secure’.¹⁹⁶ He repeated the sentiment a month later when he declared that ‘this country could not rest its safety on any thing but an armed population’,¹⁹⁷ and again in May 1812 when he informed the House of Commons that ‘It would be found, however, by referring to history, that those sovereigns were more secure and more beloved who relied on their people, than those who relied on armies’.¹⁹⁸ In July 1812 during debates on measures to preserve the public peace by increasing the powers of night-watchmen and magistrates in the city of London, Burdett recommended to the House the practice of ‘old times’, which was ‘to arm all the inhabitants; to put them under the direction of some constituted authority, and to make the sheriff of every county responsible, and every district in a county responsible for the mischiefs that might occur’.¹⁹⁹ He also criticised parliament for ‘disarming the people’, which he regarded as a ‘humiliating ... badge of slavery’, and declared ‘he would rather die on his threshold, than give up his arms’.²⁰⁰ In 1830 during the crisis caused by the Swing Riots in the south of England, Burdett declared ‘strong measures’, such as ‘arm[ing] the householders’,²⁰¹ should be adopted to suppress the riots.

Burdett’s adherence to the neo-Harringtonian and Country ideas, particularly the concept of ancient constitutionalism, explains his rejection of other forms of radicalism that were popular during his lifetime, namely Painite and Spencean thought, both of which attacked the very things that Burdett held dear - ancient constitutionalism, the monarchy, social rank and property. The works of Thomas Paine celebrated the revolutions in America and France and were fiercely critical of

¹⁹⁵ *Parliamentary Reform*, 1809, p. 11.

¹⁹⁶ *CPD*, Volume XI, p. 26.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, Volume XXII, p. 1147-8.

¹⁹⁹ *PD*, Volume XXIII, p. 1008.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁰¹ *Broughton's Recollections*, Volume IV, p. 74.

the English government and the English monarchy. Because of his reputation as a leading radical, Burdett was often identified with Paine and Paineite ideas, particularly in his early career. In February 1798 it was claimed that Paine was ‘the “much-injured and calumniated friend” of Sir Francis Burdett’.²⁰² In 1830 Robert Huish, the author of a memoir of George IV’s reign, remarked that in 1810 Burdett was ‘the head and leader’ of a radical party whose ‘champion’ was Thomas Paine.²⁰³ Burdett certainly recognised the talents of Paine as a political writer, in 1819 describing him as an ‘able and honest man’,²⁰⁴ and there were some elements of Paine’s writing that were similar to Burdett’s own ideas. For example, in the first part of *Rights of Man*, Paine praised the French for having equal electoral districts and biennial elections, and celebrated the clause of their constitution which stated that no member of the French National Assembly could be an officer of the government or in receipt of a government pension. Burdett approved of all these proposals, and wanted to see them enacted in England.²⁰⁵ Also, like Burdett, Paine was opposed to the excessive taxation levied by the British Government.²⁰⁶ However, there were crucial elements of Paine’s work that Burdett found unacceptable, namely its rejection of the English constitution, its attacks on social rank, and its Republicanism.

Paine’s attitude towards the English constitution was dismissive and irreverent. In part one of *Rights of Man* he even denied its very existence, claiming that because the English constitution could not be produced in ‘visible form’,²⁰⁷ England was ‘without

²⁰² *The Anti-Jacobin, or Weekly Examiner*, 12 February 1798. This was in response to a comment allegedly made by Burdett at a meeting of the Friends of Parliamentary Reform in 1797. He is said to have remarked that Paine was ‘an honest man, too long calumniated’ (Moreau, J. N., *Testimonials to the merits of Thomas Paine: author of “Common Sense”, “The Crisis”, “Rights of Man”, “English System of Finance”, “Age of Reason”, &c &c*, (New Jersey, 1861), p. 25).

²⁰³ Huish, R., *Memoirs of George the Fourth, descriptive of the most interesting scenes of his private and public life and the important events of his memorable reign; with characteristic sketches of all the celebrated men who were his friends and companions as Prince and his Ministers and Counsellors as a Monarch* (2 Vols., London, 1830), p. 14.

²⁰⁴ *Westminster Election 1819*, p. 113.

²⁰⁵ See Chapter 3.

²⁰⁶ In *Rights of Man* Paine claimed that taxation in England was ‘forty-eight shillings and sixpence per head’ compared to just ‘thirteen shillings per head’ in France. (Paine, T., *Rights of Man* (2 Vols., London, 1819), Part II, p. 45).

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, Part I, p. 29.

a constitution'.²⁰⁸ Paine repeated the sentiment in part two of the work, declaring 'no such thing as a constitution exists in England'.²⁰⁹ He rejected what Burdett regarded as key constitutional documents, claiming that the Magna Carta 'did not create and give powers to Government in the manner a Constitution does'²¹⁰ and calling the Bill of Rights 'a bill of wrongs and of insult'.²¹¹ Paine also rejected the concept of ancient constitutionalism and mocked those who revered the past, remarking

The error of those who reason by precedent drawn from antiquity, respecting the Rights of Man, is, that they do not go far enough into antiquity. They do not go the whole way. They step in some of the intermediate stages, of a hundred, or a thousand years, and produce what was then done, as a rule for the present day. This is no authority at all.²¹²

Paine was fiercely critical of the monarchy and the aristocracy. In *Common Sense* he described English kings as 'crowned ruffians' who 'hath little more to do than make war and give away places; which in plain terms, is to impoverish the nation',²¹³ and labelled George III as 'the Royal brute of Britain'.²¹⁴ In part two of *Rights of Man* Paine described the monarchy as 'a bubble, a mere Court artifice to procure money'.²¹⁵ He also advocated the abolition of aristocratic titles, which was tantamount to abolition of the aristocracy. Burdett, as we have seen, regarded the upper classes as the natural leaders of the country. Paine, however, claimed that 'there is an unnatural fitness in Aristocracy to be legislators for a nation'.²¹⁶ Paine's ideas attacked the very foundations of Burdett's concept of the constitutionalism. Consequently, he did not hold Paine in the high regard that other radicals of the period did and did not celebrate Paine's work or use Painite ideas in his parliamentary or public speeches.²¹⁷

²⁰⁸ Ibid., Part I, p. 30.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., Part II, p. 43.

²¹⁰ Ibid., Part II, p. 44.

²¹¹ Ibid., Part II, p. 44.

²¹² Ibid., Part I, p. 24.

²¹³ Paine, T., *Common Sense* (1776), p. 17.

²¹⁴ Ibid., p. 31.

²¹⁵ Paine, T., *Rights of Man* (2 Vols., London, 1819), Part II, p. 35.

²¹⁶ Ibid., Part I, p. 40.

²¹⁷ According to Claeys, 'Paine's appeal and tactics were anathema' to Burdett (Claeys, G. *Thomas Paine: Social and Political Thought* (London, 1989), p. 210).

Spencean ideas were even more unattractive to Burdett. Thomas Spence (1750-1814), a radical bookseller, was an advocate of land nationalisation. An impoverished upbringing in Newcastle had instilled within Spence a deep sense of injustice that those who worked hardest were often the poorest and he became convinced that the only way to solve the problems of the country was to redistribute private estates equally amongst the people. In *The Real Rights of Man*, a published version of a lecture he gave before the Newcastle Philosophical Society in 1775, Spence talked of the injustice of private property, remarking 'men may not live in any part of this world, not even where they are born, but as strangers, and by the permission of the pretender to the property thereof'.²¹⁸ He described 'the first landholders' as 'usurpers and tyrants'²¹⁹ and claimed that 'the land or earth, in any country or neighbourhood ... belongs at all times to the living inhabitants of the said country or neighbourhood in an equal manner'.²²⁰ Spence outlined a plan of land reform, by which parishes would form themselves into corporations, of which all inhabitants would be members, and take possession of all the land within the parish. The land would then be shared out equally amongst the parishioners, who would pay a small annual rent. The revenue from this rent would be used 'in doing whatever the people think proper',²²¹ with any surplus being redistributed equally amongst the inhabitants. Throughout the 1790s Spence developed and refined these ideas. He soon realised that landlords would not quietly surrender their lands and was willing to consider forcible means in order to put his plan into effect. In 1812 Spence founded the Society of Spencean Philanthropists, which continued to spread Spencean ideas after his death in 1814. It was this group who organised the Spa Fields Meetings in November and December 1816, the second of which turned into a riot. Members of the Spencean Philanthropists were also involved in the Cato Street Conspiracy to assassinate members of the Cabinet in 1820. As with Paine, there were some similarities between

²¹⁸ Spence, T., *The meridian sun of liberty; or, the whole rights of man displayed and most accurately defined, in a lecture read at the Philosophical Society in Newcastle on 8th November 1775* (London, 1796), p. 7. This work is more commonly known as *The Real Rights of Man*.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

the ideas of Burdett and those of Spence. Like Burdett, Spence owed a debt to the ideas of Harrington and the 'Country' ideology, particularly regarding his views on the right to bear arms and the belief that property in land was the basis of political power. However, Spence's attack on the landed aristocracy and his advocacy of physical force would have been abhorrent to a country gentleman like Burdett, who throughout his career resisted anything he regarded as an attack on property rights and was opposed to obtaining political and social change through violent means. Consequently, Burdett took a dim view Spence's ideas and the Spencean Philanthropists. In November 1816 Burdett and Henry 'Orator' Hunt were asked by the Spenceans to make an address at the Spa Fields meetings. Burdett, refused to do so, informing Hunt 'I would not go'.²²² During debates on the Seditious Meetings Bill in February 1817 Burdett described the Spenceans as 'wild enthusiasts' and described Spence's land reform plan as an 'absurd project'.²²³

II

Burdett entered parliament in October 1796 with a strong desire to protect and defend the rights and liberties of his fellow countrymen against the encroachments of the government, quickly earning himself a reputation as a champion of liberty and defender of the constitution.²²⁴ He made clear his intentions during his maiden speech, on 23 March 1797, when he described himself as 'a friend to humanity and liberty' and 'an enemy to cruelty and oppression'.²²⁵ Two months later he vowed 'to protect the rights and liberties of the people'²²⁶ and promised to 'use every means in my power to obtain for the people their just rights'.²²⁷ He also declared 'Liberty is, in my mind, the most valuable level in human life! It is what I value more than life;

²²² Wiltshire and Swindon Record Office, 1883/188, Burdett and Jones Family Papers. Burdett to Richard Crabtree, 7 December 1816.

²²³ *PD*, Volume XXXV, p. 608.

²²⁴ See Section III below for an analysis of Burdett's reputation as a champion of liberty and also his reputation as a dangerous radical.

²²⁵ *PR*, 3rd Series, Volume II, p. 121.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 608.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 610.

without it, life itself is of no value'.²²⁸ Burdett repeated these sentiments regularly throughout his career in order to cement his reputation as the champion of liberty and defender of the constitution. In November 1798 he declared to the Commons that 'we should all be firmly determined to repel any attack upon our laws and Constitution'.²²⁹ During the 1804 Middlesex election Burdett promised the freeholders that if they elected him he would 'mount triumphant ... and restore the constitution to its pristine vigour and security'.²³⁰ and also declared it was his intention to 'animate the drooping spirit of liberty in the country'.²³¹ When presenting his 1809 parliamentary reform proposal to the Commons Burdett claimed it was 'material and necessary to maintain the Constitution'.²³² At his libel trial, in March 1820, Burdett declared that 'As an English gentleman, I consider myself bound to assist in upholding the rights of my countrymen; and I can show that this has ever been the prevailing bent and disposition of my mind'.²³³ While pursuing this course of action and in dealing with the government over issues concerning liberty and the constitution, Burdett consistently followed a Country/neo-Harringtonian programme. This focused primarily on restoring and defending particular rights and liberties granted to the people by the ancient constitution of England, such as the freedom of speech and the right to protection from arbitrary imprisonment, but was also characterised by a suspicion of the ministry, the 'court' of Burdett's day, and their ability to corrupt both parliament and the monarchy; a desire to root out and prevent corrupt practices and the encouragement of cheap and honest government. Burdett also employed Country and neo-Harringtonian tactics by using historical precedent in his arguments against government infringements of the constitution and by referring to the works of eighteenth century constitutional thinkers. This enabled him to present himself as a restorer and defender, while at the same time representing the government as innovators and the real enemies of liberty.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Ibid., Volume VII, p. 49.

²³⁰ *Middlesex Election 1804*, p. 23.

²³¹ *The Times*, 27 July 1804.

²³² *CPD*, Volume XIV, p. 1046.

²³³ *State Trials*, p. 34.

Burdett strongly believed that successive ministries of his day were undermining the constitution. In May 1797, for example, he claimed that Pitt's government had 'destroyed' the 'bulwarks of our Constitution',²³⁴ thereby depriving the people of fundamental rights and liberties. In November 1800 he claimed that the government had 'annihilated the dearest rights and liberties of our countrymen at home'.²³⁵ Burdett was especially critical of the government's attempts to destroy the freedom of speech through their attacks on the liberty of the press, complaining in January 1798 that as a result of government suppression the House of Commons was 'the only place in which it is any longer permitted to speak ... [my] sentiments to my countrymen'.²³⁶ Burdett considered the liberty of the press as 'one of the grandest bulwarks of the freedom of these kingdoms',²³⁷ and a barometer for the state of liberty in the country as it was one of the key means by which the government could be held to account for its actions. It was 'essential to the freedom of the country'.²³⁸ He regarded the 'free animadversions upon public men and public conduct' as 'the only check we have on our rulers' and 'the only prop we have left to sustain the tottering fabric of the rights of the People'.²³⁹

The growth of a relatively unrestrained press in London and the provinces began with the expiry of the Printing Act (also known as the Licensing Act) in 1695. The act, first passed in 1665, confined printers to London, Oxford and Cambridge, restricted the number of presses and placed strict controls on the number of printers and the numbers of apprentices they could employ. After the expiration of the Act, the only way that the government could in any way regulate or control the press was by increasing stamp duty and enforcing libel laws. In the early nineteenth century, in the wake of the French Revolution and during and after the Napoleonic Wars, the government were keen to suppress any publications which advocated revolution or appealed to the masses. As a result, between 1790 and 1832 there were over 200 cases

²³⁴ *PR*, 3rd Series, Volume II, p. 690.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, Volume XIII, p. 37.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, Volume IV, p. 537

²³⁷ *CPD*, Volume XXI, p. 23-4.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, Volume XIX, p. 581.

²³⁹ *PR*, 3rd Series, Volume VI, p. 389.

of blasphemous and seditious libel brought before the King's Bench, 'a substantial increase over previous eras'.²⁴⁰ Although far less than half of cases resulted in sentencing, only twenty per cent of those between 1808 and 1812, peaking at thirty-eight per cent between 1817 and 1822,²⁴¹ the threat of prosecution for libel did constrain the liberty of the press as, whether prosecuted or not, proceedings were very damaging for those concerned, both physically in terms of mental stress and the hardship of incarceration, and financially. Burdett was enormously critical of the law of libel, believing it to be 'undefined and unintelligible'.²⁴² It was an 'innovation'.²⁴³ In February 1811 he claimed that the term libel 'implies nothing, and there is no law whatever on the subject',²⁴⁴ and at his own libel trial, in March 1820, denied that the offence existed, remarking

The very term was unknown to the old English law; it means simply a little book, and has been borrowed from the Civil Law courts, being first introduced by the Star Chamber, a tribunal which for its iniquitous proceedings has been long since happily abolished A libel in itself is nothing.²⁴⁵

Burdett claimed that the law of libel 'had been borrowed from the slavish imperial code' and had flourished under the 'Roman despots, such as *Nero*, *Caligula* and *Tiberius*' who had used it to 'banish and destroy all the eminent men'.²⁴⁶ Burdett objected to the severity of the punishment for libel and the suffering inflicted on those accused, whether found guilty or not. In March 1811 he referred to the 'dreadful penalties'²⁴⁷ of libel charges and at his own trial in 1820 complained that 'even in the event of an acquittal, I shall be pretty well punished by the expense, labour, and anxiety to which the prosecution has subjected me'.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁰ Harling, P., 'The Law of Libel and the Limits of Repression, 1790-1832', *HJ* 44, 1 (2004), p. 108.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

²⁴² *The Times*, 30 December 1817.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 21 February 1811.

²⁴⁵ *State Trials*, p. 28.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁷ *CPD*, Volume XIX, p. 588.

²⁴⁸ *State Trials*, p. 33.

Burdett was particularly opposed to the government's use of *ex officio* informations²⁴⁹ in libel prosecutions, describing them as a 'monstrous, illegal and oppressive power'.²⁵⁰ In such cases, the legal process involved proved both costly and stressful for the accused. Many were required to pay large sums as 'securities' for good behaviour, sometimes as much as £1,000, or face waiting in jail until their case was called, which in some instances took up to a year. The accused, regardless of the outcome, were required to pay all legal costs. Many found themselves incurring heavy debts, imprisonment and a great deal of mental stress, only to be acquitted or for their cases not to come to trial. Those with *ex-officio* informations filed against them often did not know the nature of the accusation against them. The only way that defendants could discover their 'crime' was by purchasing a copy of the information, at an exorbitant price, from the crown office. Trial dates were given at short notice, giving defendants little time to put together an effective defence, judges often recommended a guilty verdict, and juries were frequently packed with 'guinea-men' in the pay of the government. Burdett spoke out against the practice in March 1811 when he supported Lord Folkestone's motion for an enquiry into the use of *ex-officio* informations in cases of libel. Burdett challenged their use on constitutional grounds, describing them as a power 'novel in its nature' and 'hostile to every principle of our constitution'.²⁵¹ It was 'of modern adoption', 'of foreign extraction' and 'contrary to English law'.²⁵² Burdett claimed that the power of *ex officio* informations was used 'to destroy free discussion and the constitutional liberty of the press',²⁵³ and while such a power existed it was 'a farce to talk of the Liberty of the Press'²⁵⁴ as 'any publication which had a tendency to hurt the feelings of persons in high stations, was a libel',²⁵⁵ whether true or not. He also attacked the practice in January 1812, describing it as 'a power of a novel and most dangerous kind' which 'could on no principle be reconciled to the

²⁴⁹ These were filed by the attorney or solicitor-general in order to quickly deal with misdemeanours in cases where it was felt that it would be dangerous to the security of the country if there was any delay in prosecution.

²⁵⁰ *CPD*, Volume XIX, p. 602.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 585.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 602.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 590.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 585.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 588.

ideas of law, of justice, or of common sense or feeling'.²⁵⁶ In July 1812 Burdett again criticised the use of *ex officio* informations, this time informing the house that, according to Blackstone, 'Ex Officio informations were not legal, excepting in cases where immediate interposition was necessary, to prevent further danger by delay'.²⁵⁷ Burdett described his own libel trial in March 1820 as 'a most pregnant instance of the scandalous abuse of *ex officio* power'²⁵⁸ and used the trial itself as a platform to criticise *ex officio* informations, describing them as 'contrary to the spirit of the constitution contrary to Magna Charta, contrary to the fundamental laws of the country, and contrary to common sense'.²⁵⁹ He traced their use through history and gave examples of legal and constitutional authorities, such 'Mr. Justice Blackstone', 'Chief Justice Hale and many other great judges',²⁶⁰ who had opposed this 'power at variance with the happiness and safety of the subject'.²⁶¹

Throughout his career, Burdett defended the liberty of the press against government encroachments. In June 1798 he fiercely opposed the Newspaper Act, which increased the power of the government to supervise and control the content of the press. Under the act, details of all printers, publishers and proprietors of newspapers had to be submitted to the Stamp Office and copies of every newspaper printed in the country had to be sent to the office for scrutiny. In addition anyone found to be printing material which was seen as inciting hatred or contempt towards the King, the government or the constitution of the country was to be punished by a prison sentence of six to twelve months. When speaking on the act, Burdett claimed that that the press already 'labours under greater restraint than is necessary for the suppressing of licentiousness, or even than is consistent with perfect freedom'²⁶² and reminded ministers that 'a good Government, a free Government' had 'nothing to apprehend, and every thing to hope, from the Liberty of the Press', only 'a Government aiming at

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, Volume XXI, p. 23-4.

²⁵⁷ *PD*, Volume XXIII, p. 1262.

²⁵⁸ *State Trials*, p. 26.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*

²⁶² *PR*, 3rd Series, Volume VI, p. 388.

tyranny will never think the press under enough control'.²⁶³ Burdett accused the government of using the 'dread of Revolution' in order to pass measures contrary to the constitution of England, labelling ministers 'Revolutionists' and claiming that 'they have nearly completed a great Revolution, not in favour of, but against liberty'.²⁶⁴ Burdett regarded the case of John Gale Jones in April 1810 as having significant implications for free speech and the liberty of the press. Gale Jones had been imprisoned for initiating a debate, the subject of which concerned the liberty of the press.²⁶⁵ Burdett claimed that 'the fate of this one man (as is the effect of all punishments) will deter others from expressing their opinions of the conduct of those who have the power to punish him'.²⁶⁶ Thus, it was important to challenge Gale Jones's imprisonment and in doing so defend the principle of free speech and the liberty of the press. In December 1819 Burdett objected to the Six Acts, two of which curtailed the liberty of the press, one providing for the more effective punishment for libel and the other increasing stamp duty on newspapers and periodicals. Burdett, who regarded the acts as 'calculated to trench on those great, those prescriptive, and, he would say, in reason, those inalienable rights of the people of England',²⁶⁷ voiced his objection to 'any check' being placed 'on the common liberty of speech',²⁶⁸ and called for the restoration of the 'acknowledged right of a free and unshackled press'.²⁶⁹

In this spirit, Burdett was quick to leap to the defence of individuals who had been prosecuted for libel. In February 1811 he chaired a meeting held at the Crown and Anchor Tavern to raise money for Irish publicist Peter Finnerty, who had been imprisoned for criticising Castlereagh over his treatment of the Irish and his conduct of the war with France. In his speech to those assembled Burdett complained of

²⁶³ Ibid., p. 389.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 390.

²⁶⁵ The subject under debate was: 'Which was a greater outrage upon the public feeling, Mr. Yorke's enforcement of the Standing Order to exclude strangers from the House of Commons, or Mr. Windham's recent attack upon the liberty of the press?' (*Memoirs of the Life of Burdett*, p. 21).

²⁶⁶ *Burdett to his constituents*, 1810, p. 10.

²⁶⁷ *The Times*, 9 December 1819.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

government attacks on the freedom of speech as ‘even the last vestige of liberty, the liberty of complaining, was now taken away’.²⁷⁰ He declared that Finnerty ‘deserved their support’ as it was their duty ‘to protect and support any public writer who would venture, under so many discouragements to speak the truth boldly and without fear’,²⁷¹ and supported Finnerty’s petition to the House of Commons against his conviction. In June 1817 Burdett presented a petition to the House of Commons on behalf of Thomas Wooler, editor of the *Black Dwarf*, who had been arrested and tried under an ex officio information. At his trial Wooler had been declared guilty. However, the verdict was read out before the entire jury had entered the courtroom and had been recorded as unanimous, when it was not. Burdett, who ‘happened to be in the court at the time’, claimed that this was a deliberate attempt to ‘entrap a jury into a verdict’.²⁷² A new trial had been ordered with a new jury but to Wooler this was unacceptable. He refused to submit to a retrial and requested either an acquittal or a retrial by the same jury. Burdett claimed that the retrial was ‘a violation of the first principle of common law, that a man could not be in danger for the same offence’.²⁷³ It was also unfair as Wooler’s defence was already known to the prosecution who would have ‘unfair advantage’²⁷⁴ in the second trial. Burdett implored the House to consider Wooler’s plight and agree to his terms. In December 1817 Burdett attended a meeting of ‘the friends of the liberty of the press and trial by jury’²⁷⁵ held in honour of William Hone who had recently been tried for blasphemy for the production of three parodies which criticised the government. Burdett commended Hone for his ‘manly exertions in favour of the people’ and objected to the ‘false pretences on which the prosecution was founded’ and ‘the oppressive manner in which it was conducted’.²⁷⁶ In March 1823 he defended Mary Ann Carlile, a bookseller, who had been fined £500 and imprisoned for one year for blasphemous libel in August 1821, but was forced to remain in prison because of her inability to pay the fine. Burdett

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 21 February 1811.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*

²⁷² *PD*, Volume XXXVI, p. 1190.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 1192.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1192.

²⁷⁵ *The Times*, 30 December 1817.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

claimed Carlile had been the victim of ‘gross and monstrous oppression’ and declared her fine to be ‘enormous and scandalous’.²⁷⁷

For Burdett the liberty of the press was closely linked with another ‘sacred and constitutional right’,²⁷⁸ that of trial by jury. It was a right enshrined in the Magna Carta, which declared that ‘no Freeman shall be arrested, imprisoned, or in any way destroyed, but by the judgement of his Peers’,²⁷⁹ and also in several Acts of Edward III, which declared that ‘no man shall be put to answer without presentment of good and lawful men, before Justices’.²⁸⁰ Burdett regarded the liberty of the press and trial by jury as being ‘inseparably connected’ as he felt that the liberty of the press was ‘wholly dependent on the purity of trial by jury’,²⁸¹ which he believed was regularly undermined by the government, particularly in libel cases where the juries were often ‘packed and selected’²⁸² in order to secure the verdict the government wanted. This interference with the independence of juries undermined and destroyed the ‘undoubted birthright’ confirmed by ‘the Great Charter’ that ‘no man shall be taken, any more than tried, unless *per judicium purium*, by a jury of his country’.²⁸³ In April 1810 Burdett claimed that trial by jury had been ‘violated’ by the House of Commons, who had convicted John Gale Jones of breach of parliamentary privilege and imprisoned him ‘without Trial’.²⁸⁴ In March 1811 during his speech against the use of ex officio informations in libel cases Burdett complained about the use of ‘special juries’, remarking

is it not notoriously known, that the persons who usually serve on special juries are men who make this employment subservient to their profit? and convert the performance of their duty into a source of revenue? They are, with scarce any exception, connected in some shape

²⁷⁷ *The Republican*, 4 April 1823.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.* Burdett used similar language at an election dinner in Nottingham in September 1823, describing trial by jury as one of two ‘vital privileges’ (the other being a freely elected parliament) and a ‘sacred right’. See *The Times*, 26 September 1823.

²⁷⁹ *Burdett to his constituents*, 1810, p. 33.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

²⁸¹ *The Times*, 30 December 1817.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, 21 February 1811.

²⁸³ *CPD*, Volume XIX, p. 593.

or other with the government.²⁸⁵

He claimed that special juries were ‘a modern invention, for nullifying the cheque of juries on judges, and for procuring acceptable verdicts’.²⁸⁶ They were ‘a grievance not to be endured’.²⁸⁷ In December 1816 Burdett again complained of the introduction of a ‘novel doctrine’, by which ‘Judges now said that juries can be packed and chosen’.²⁸⁸ Burdett thought the jury at his own libel trial was likely to be packed, writing to Hobhouse on 14 February 1820 that he had been assured ‘I should have the most respectable (that’s the word for thriving fatheaded knaves) Jury’.²⁸⁹ A week later he alluded once more to his belief that the jury at his trial had been chosen to secure his conviction, remarking ‘my opinions is that a pack’d Leicestershire Jury would if directed by a Judge & Att[orne]y Gen[era]l find Abel guilty of the murder of Cain’.²⁹⁰ Burdett keenly supported any measure designed to protect the right of trial by jury. In February 1822 he warmly supported Thomas Spring Rice’s amendment to the Irish Insurrection Bill which would make trial by jury a necessary part of the bill. In May 1825 Burdett celebrated Peel’s Juries Bill, which consolidated eighty-five laws concerning juries into a single act, extended the number of those eligible to be jurors and insisted that special juries were selected by ballot. He claimed that the passage of the Act would be ‘one of the greatest benefits bestowed upon the country from the time of the Revolution’.²⁹¹

Burdett was strongly opposed to any violation of or interference with the Habeas Corpus Act (1679), which he regarded as a ‘great bulwark of personal liberty’²⁹² and an essential element of the constitution. He described this principle, which defended the people from arbitrary imprisonment, as ‘the pride of our country’.²⁹³ In the late 1790s and early 1800s the Habeas Corpus Act was frequently suspended, meaning

²⁸⁴ *Burdett to his constituents*, 1810, p. 43.

²⁸⁵ *CPD*, Volume XIX, p. 597.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 598.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 598.

²⁸⁸ *The Times*, 30 December 1817.

²⁸⁹ BL, Broughton Papers, Add MSS 47222, folio 21. Burdett to Hobhouse, 14 February 1820.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, Add MSS 36458, folio 111. Burdett to Hobhouse, 20 February 1820.

²⁹¹ *The Times*, 24 May 1825.

²⁹² *PR*, 3rd Series, Volume VII, p. 156.

that the government could imprison indefinitely whomever they regarded as a threat without charge. Burdett consistently voted against every government attempt to suspend or to extend the suspension of habeas corpus, and regularly spoke on the subject in the House of Commons. On 10 December 1798 he successfully moved that a list of persons confined under the suspension of Habeas Corpus be submitted to the Commons, arguing that ‘some little account of the use which has been made of this dreadful power’²⁹⁴ was necessary, or else he feared that parliament would continue to disregard liberty unchallenged. He regarded the suspension of such an important safeguard of personal freedom as ‘exorbitant’ and ‘improper’.²⁹⁵ Eleven days later Burdett voted against Pitt’s motion to increase the period of suspension on the basis that ‘No ground had, in his opinion, been stated upon which the House could surrender so important a bulwark of the liberties of the subject’.²⁹⁶ He also objected to the renewal of the Act in February 1800, arguing that suspension of the act changed the law of the land and violated the common law and claiming that ‘there was no part of the Constitution which ministers had not violated ... they had left to the country nothing of the Constitution but its corruption’.²⁹⁷ In December 1800, during debates to extend the suspension, Burdett complained that ‘Ministers had grossly abused this power already’²⁹⁸ and condemned the government for their constant attacks on the constitutional rights and liberties of the people and accused them of ‘trump[ing] up new stories of plots and conspiracies’ in order to justify their actions.²⁹⁹ In April 1802 Burdett claimed that the government had ‘destroyed’ the Habeas Corpus Act, and with it ‘the confidence of the subject’³⁰⁰. He criticised the Commons for voting in favour of suspending the act, remarking ‘the House of Commons, which, according to the Constitution, should be the jealous observer and controller of the acts of the Executive, the protector and guardian of the people and the law have broken the

²⁹³ *Burdett to his constituents*, 1810, p. 9.

²⁹⁴ *PR*, 3rd Series, Volume VII, p. 156.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 344.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, Volume X, p. 634.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, Volume XIII, p. 444.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 518.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, Volume XVIII, p. 11.

law'.³⁰¹ In 1817, in the wake of the Spa Fields riots and Derbyshire uprising, the government again moved to suspend Habeas Corpus. Burdett remained opposed. In June 1817 when speaking in support of Lord's Folkestone's motion for a list of those confined under Habeas Corpus suspension to be presented before the house, he claimed that the act was 'illegal', 'unconstitutional' and had been 'unknown until that unfortunate period of 1794'.³⁰² It was a 'detestable act, by which the liberties of Englishmen were thus sacrificed'.³⁰³ During debates in the third reading of the suspension bill Burdett claimed that there was no justification for suspending habeas corpus and criticised the government for giving up 'the personal security of every man in England' on 'flimsy grounds'.³⁰⁴ He questioned the existence of the 'insurrections and plots'³⁰⁵ against the government and claimed that even if they did exist suspending habeas corpus would do little to prevent them. A month later Burdett attacked parliament for the passage of the act, remarking 'To hold one's liberty at the pleasure of another man was a state of life scarcely preferable to death. No evil could be greater than solitary, arbitrary confinement'.³⁰⁶

Burdett's opposition to the suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act had close links with his campaign to improve prison conditions. He first spoke out against the appalling conditions in prisons in June 1798, condemning the government for 'the infamous practice ... of sending men to those bastilles which disgrace the face of the country - those private prisons where, under the pretence of regulations, punishments are inflicted upon men as illegal as they are cruel and unjust',³⁰⁷ and took up the cause proper at the end of that year after seeing letters written by inmates, apparently in their own blood, telling of ill treatment in Coldbath Fields Prison, Middlesex. In November and December 1798 Burdett paid three visits to Coldbaths in order to investigate the situation for himself. The cruelty and deprivation that found there so

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

³⁰² *PD*, Volume XXXVI, p. 941.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 942.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1248.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1240.

³⁰⁶ *PD*, Volume XXXVI, p. 1413.

³⁰⁷ *PR*, 3rd Series, Volume VI, p. 390.

appalled him that he raised the issue in parliament. Most outrageous to Burdett was the fact that most of the men subjected to the horror he had witnessed had not been charged with or convicted of any crime; they had been deprived of one of the most basic constitutional rights on the whim of the government, who had suspended civil liberties on the spurious grounds of the threat of revolution. In November 1798 Burdett complained about 'the management of prisons and treatment of prisoners', and 'those Bastilles, called Houses of Correction, where severities were exercised upon men not charged even with any crime'.³⁰⁸ On 21 December, during debates on the second reading of Pitt's motion for an extension of Habeas Corpus suspension, Burdett raised the plight of a group of prisoners confined under the Suspension Act who had been brought to Coldbaths from Manchester in irons and had been held in solitary confinement in cells just eight feet by six with no fire or candle, exposed to the cold weather and forced to bribe the jailor for a bed. Five days later, he again raised the plight of the Manchester prisoners and urged the House to investigate prison conditions. In February 1800 Burdett protested that who those were 'illegally and cruelly confined' under the Habeas Corpus Suspension Act were 'under torture of mind and body'.³⁰⁹ In April 1802 he again complained that ministers had kept men in 'close, cruel and illegal custody ... without charge, without knowing their accusers, without daring to bring a man to trial'.³¹⁰

All of those that Burdett publicly defended were prisoners that he believed had been confined illegally. His firm support for the suspected revolutionary Colonel Despard, for example, was based on his belief that Despard was innocent,³¹¹ and Burdett continued to speak in support of 'innocent' prisoners throughout his career. In February 1811 Burdett raised in parliament the case of an officer named Colville who had been imprisoned in Coldbaths, in solitary confinement, for two years, with no charges having been made against him.³¹² In April 1822 Burdett spoke at length in

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, Volume VII, p. 49.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, Volume X, p. 531.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, Volume XVIII, p. 9.

³¹¹ See Chapter 2, Section I.

³¹² See *CPD*, Volume XVIII, p. 1187-8.

parliament in defence of Henry Hunt, who in March 1820 had been sentenced to serve two and a half years in Ilchester Gaol. Burdett, who believed Hunt to be 'as innocent a man as could be',³¹³ condemned conditions in the prison and Hunt's own treatment at the hands of the prison authorities. Burdett's passionate defence of radical publicist John Gale Jones in April 1810 was based on the same principle, that Gale Jones had been imprisoned illegally; he had committed no crime. Burdett claimed that in their proceedings against Gale Jones the House of Commons had 'gone beyond its prescribed limits' and 'violated the fundamental principles of the Law and Constitution of the Land'.³¹⁴ Gale Jones had been imprisoned 'for an act, the legality of which has not been proved'.³¹⁵ Moreover, the House of Commons had no legal right to imprison Gale Jones as it is stated in law that no man may be imprisoned unless by the order of a Court of Record, or by a lawful warrant. The Commons was not a Court of Record, nor did the Speaker of the Commons have any legal authority to issue warrants and 'by proceeding thus, they have exercised a jurisdiction not vested in them'.³¹⁶ Burdett believed that the Commons had taken the unprecedented step of punishing Gale Jones themselves as they knew that no court of law would convict him of any crime. He obviously feared for the future if the Commons' blatant disregard of the Constitution was allowed to pass unchallenged:

What is there to restrain them if they are to be the sole judges of the extent of their own powers, and if they are to exercise those powers without any controul, and without leaving the parties, whom they choose to punish, any mode of appeal, any means of redress?³¹⁷

It was an issue of enormous importance and one that had significant implications for the constitution and the cause of liberty,

for, talk as long as we will about Rights, Liberties, Franchises, Privileges and Immunities, of what avail are any, or all of these together, if our Persons can, at the sole will and command of any man, or set of

³¹³ *PD*, New Series, Volume VII, p. 5.

³¹⁴ *Burdett to his constituents*, 1810, p. 16.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

men, be seized on, thrown into prison, and there kept during the pleasure of that man, or set of men?³¹⁸

Should the Commons be allowed to proceed against Gale Jones in this manner, no one would be safe from their unchecked power and all rights and liberties would cease to have any significance. The Commons would be given free reign to imprison whoever they pleased and for whatever reason they judged appropriate. Burdett argued that it was 'now the time to resist the doctrine upon which Mr. Jones has been sent to Newgate' or 'cease all pretensions to those liberties which were acquired by our forefathers, after so many struggles and sacrifices'.³¹⁹ His words echo those of Blackstone who, in his *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765), declared that 'if it were left in the power of any, the highest, magistrate to imprison arbitrarily whomever he or his officers thought proper, there would soon be an end of all other rights and immunities'.³²⁰

Two further important constitutional rights under threat from the government was the people's right of assembly and petition. Burdett believed that it was the 'imprescriptable right of the people of England to meet and express their opinions on the political state of their country'.³²¹ He regarded open and free discussion of political topics as 'the best way, & indeed the only way, of keeping alive a spark of freedom, in a country where the flame is nearly extinguished'.³²² Burdett believed that it was also the right of the people to petition the crown and parliament to seek redress for their grievances. He described this right of petition as 'the subjects' high road to the throne' and claimed that 'it was essential to the health of the constitution that it should be kept at all times open'.³²³ Both of these rights were especially important in Burdett's day as they represented the only means through which the people could make their voices heard. They were unable to go through the proper

³¹⁸ Ibid., p. 8.

³¹⁹ Ibid., p. 6.

³²⁰ Blackstone, W., *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (4 Vols., Oxford, 1765, 1966 reprint), Book I, p. 131.

³²¹ *The Times*, 3 September 1819.

³²² Bod., Burdett-Coutts Papers, MSS 39455, folio 78. Burdett to Lord Stanhope, 24 January 1799.

³²³ CPD, Volume XV, p. 117.

channel, the House of Commons, as electoral corruption meant that 'there are few members returned by the people'³²⁴ and thus few constituencies had a voice in the House. Burdett regularly attended political meetings and frequently presented petitions to the House, most of them calling for parliamentary reform or Catholic Emancipation, but there were also many others from individuals or groups complaining of harsh treatment at the hands of the government and asking for redress. He believed that petitioning was a legitimate and effective way of encouraging the government to make changes. In 1810 Burdett encouraged his own constituents to petition the Commons to protest against the treatment of John Gale Jones, assuring them 'Your voices may come with more force; may command greater respect ... may prove irresistible',³²⁵ after his own protests in the House had been unsuccessful. At a meeting held at Reading in September 1818 to celebrate the return of independent MP Charles Fysche Palmer, Burdett urged the people to petition the House for reform, claiming 'little good can be done by the exertions of members; it is only by union, by a general concurrence without the House in petitioning, that any effect can be given to the efforts within the House'.³²⁶ The Peterloo Massacre, and the government measures taken in response, placed the right of people to gather for political purposes and their right to petition for redress under threat. The government's attack on those assembled at St Peter's Field filled Burdett with 'shame, grief and indignation'.³²⁷ He was outraged that the peaceful and legal gathering of men, women and children for the purpose of petitioning the house for reform had been so brutally suppressed. He regarded what had occurred that day as 'a flagrant violation of the constitution'³²⁸ and a direct attack on the right of people to meet for the purpose of petitioning parliament for redress of grievances. The attack continued with the repressive measures taken by the government in response to Peterloo, the notorious Six Acts,³²⁹

³²⁴ *The Times*, 16 September 1818.

³²⁵ *Burdett to his constituents*, 1810, p. 7.

³²⁶ *The Times*, 16 September 1818.

³²⁷ *Sir Francis Burdett to the Electors of Westminster*, August 22 1819.

³²⁸ *PD*, New Series, Volume V, p. 737.

³²⁹ The Acts banned unauthorised military drilling and training, gave magistrates in 'disturbed' counties the power to search properties for arms, prevented delay in the administration of justice, banned public meetings of more than fifty people without the consent of a magistrate or sheriff, introduced more severe punishments for blasphemous and seditious libel and imposed heavy stamp

passed in December 1819. That month Burdett commented at a Westminster meeting that the Commons had 'ventured to say ... that to meet for the purpose of petitioning for a reform of parliament, carried to the length of universal suffrage and annual parliaments, was an act of treason',³³⁰ and claimed this 'was a new doctrine to him'.³³¹

Burdett defended these rights and liberties so solidly because they were an integral part of the ancient constitution of England, a constitution which he believed safeguarded the liberty of all Englishmen and a constitution that he was determined to re-establish and uphold. He strongly believed that this constitution, and therefore the country, was in danger, not from the threat of revolution from below, but from a revolution from above. He spoke at length on the subject in June 1798, condemning the 'unconstitutional measures' that ministers were 'daily introducing into the House',³³² and accusing them of having

a plan for governing this country, not according to its old liberal maxims as established at the Revolution, but according to a new system, or rather a renovated system, repugnant to every principle of liberty and justice.³³³

Burdett claimed that the government had 'feared' members into supporting their repressive measures 'by holding out to us the dread of Revolution' and declared that it was ministers themselves who 'are the great Revolutionists, the only enemy from whom we have any thing to apprehend'.³³⁴ He charged the government with having 'nearly completed a great Revolution, not in favour of, but against liberty'.³³⁵ Similarly in April 1801 he accused 'the present Administration' of passing 'edicts, all tending to the destruction of property, liberty, and the remnant of that which formerly

duty on radical newspapers and periodicals.

³³⁰ *The Times*, 9 December 1819.

³³¹ *Ibid.*

³³² *PR*, 3rd Series, Volume VI, p. 390.

³³³ *Ibid.*, p. 391.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 390.

³³⁵ *Ibid.*

went by the name of the British constitution'.³³⁶ In April 1802 Burdett moved in the House of Commons for an inquiry into the conduct of Pitt's administration, speaking at length on minister's subversion of the Constitution. He condemned the 'many material and mischievous alterations'³³⁷ which had been made by ministers to the laws of the country and also

the manifold and monstrous acts of aggression by those Ministers on the free Constitution of the country, and on the palpable and open war which they have carried on against the rights, the property, the peace and the domestic security of the People.³³⁸

Burdett accused ministers of 'subverting the Constitution, under the pretence of resisting innovation and change',³³⁹ calling them 'false prophets and tricking impostors'.³⁴⁰ He also criticised the Commons itself for failing to fulfil its constitutional role as 'the jealous observer and controller of the acts of the Executive, the protector and guardian of the people and the law', claiming it had 'broken the law'.³⁴¹ As a result of this belief, that ministers were the enemies of liberty and the constitution, Burdett consistently opposed all government measures. Between December 1796 and December 1819, for example, Burdett voted against the government in every parliamentary division.³⁴²

Burdett's belief that the government wanted to undermine and destroy liberty lay behind his opposition to the war with Revolutionary France. In May 1797 he claimed that the war with France was a 'bold and daring, but unsuccessful, attempt to stifle the flame of liberty'.³⁴³ In January 1798 he described it as a 'liberticide war'.³⁴⁴ Burdett had welcomed the French Revolution as an expression of the French people's liberty against a tyrannical regime. However, it had little impact on his own political ideas

³³⁶ *Ibid.*, Volume XV, p. 63.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, Volume XVIII, p. 3.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

³⁴² See Ginter, D. E., *Voting Records of the British House of Commons 1761-1820* (6 Vols., London, 1995).

³⁴³ *PR*, 3rd Series, Volume II, p. 608.

and he certainly did not advocate a similar course of action in England. Burdett was in Europe during the time of the French Revolution³⁴⁵ and it has been wrongly assumed that he witnessed events first hand.³⁴⁶ However, Burdett had left Paris for Switzerland in April 1789. Also, letters from the time written to his aunt, Lady Jones, show little interest in the events unfolding in France. Burdett opposed the war against Revolutionary France because he regarded it as a war against liberty and in defence of tyranny and despotism. In January 1798 Burdett opposed granting further supplies 'because I detest the purposes they are intended to promote, the prosecution of this disgraceful war, and the support of an infamous system of corruption'.³⁴⁷ He believed that the 'true grounds' for the war were that those members of the government who 'feed upon corruption and fatten on the spoils of the people'³⁴⁸ feared that the establishment of a wise and frugal Government in France might possibly infect the people of this country with a desire of feeling their own affairs administered in a like wise and frugal manner.³⁴⁹

In February 1800 Burdett criticised the government because 'The object of the war

³⁴⁴ Ibid., Volume IV, p. 543.

³⁴⁵ Between 1789 and 1791 Burdett embarked upon a tour of the continent.

³⁴⁶ In *The Passing of the Great Reform Bill* (London, 1914), Butler claims that Burdett 'had witnessed some scenes of the revolution' (p. 25). In *Daniel O'Connell: The Irish Liberator* (London, 1929), Gywnn claims that Burdett had lived in Paris 'during the three eventful years that began with the challenging constitution of the National Assembly' (p. 58). He makes the same claim in 'Religious Aspects of O'Connell's Early Life. II: The Catholic Democrat, 1790-1815' (*Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 18 (March 1929)), remarking that Burdett 'came back [to England] from two years in Paris an uncompromising and ardent disciple of the Revolution' (p. 35). Marchand, the editor of *Byron's Letters and Journals* (13 Vols., London, 1973-94), also claims that Burdett 'resided in Paris in the first years of the French Revolution' (p. 186 notes), as does Bentley who, in *Politics Without Democracy: Great Britain 1815-1914. Perception and Preoccupation in British Government* (Oxford, 1984), states that Burdett was 'in Paris during the early days of the French revolution' (p. 374). This misconception has probably come from works of the period which claimed Burdett was present in Paris during the Revolution. For example, R. Phillips's *Public Characters of 1802-1803* (London, 1803) claims Burdett 'was at Paris at an early period of the late revolution, and remained there a considerable time, but regarded the important and rapidly changing events of that epoch, as they would strike the eye of an uninterested spectator, rather than with the attention of a politician. It is true he sometimes attended the National Assembly, and the clubs that were distinguished at Paris, but it is equally certain that he felt little or no interest in the topics of discussion that agitated the breasts of the contending parties' (p. 482). However, the accuracy of this work can be called into question as there are other mistakes, such as the names for Burdett's siblings, given as Robert and Jones (p. 481) when in fact they were called Charles Sedley and William Jones.

³⁴⁷ *PR*, 3rd Series, Volume IV, p. 538-9.

³⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 539.

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

had changed so often ... that one really knew not what to depend upon'.³⁵⁰ At one time it was 'for the principles of order and religion', then it was 'for the defence of our allies', then 'for the defence of ourselves'.³⁵¹

Burdett welcomed peace when it came in 1802,³⁵² hoping it would bring an end to government repression, and travelled to France. However, it was reported that 'he declined the honour of being introduced to the despotic ruler of France'.³⁵³ It has been suggested that Burdett was an admirer of Napoleon.³⁵⁴ He certainly recognised the French leader's talent and ability, describing him in May 1808 as 'the ablest and most experienced leader modern Europe had seen'.³⁵⁵ Similarly, in 1809 he recognised Napoleon's merits and complimented him on knowing 'the best means of accomplishing the objects he had in view'³⁵⁶ but 'disclaim[ed] the idea of being the advocate of Buonaparté'.³⁵⁷ In 1815 Burdett took an interest in the fate of the captured Napoleon³⁵⁸ and warned against replacing him, seeing him as the French people's legitimate choice of ruler. War with Napoleonic France was resumed in March 1803 and Burdett remained opposed. In November 1802 he remarked in the

³⁵⁰ Ibid., Volume X, p. 530.

³⁵¹ Ibid.

³⁵² In Gillray's *Preliminaries of Peace - or - John Bull and his Little Friends "Marching to Paris"* (October 1801) Burdett is amongst the pro-French opposition who are celebrating the peace.

³⁵³ Russell, R., *The History of Modern Europe: With an Account of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire and a View of the Progress of Society from the Rise of the Modern Kingdoms to the Peace of Paris in 1768. In a series of Letters from a Nobleman to his Son. A New Edition, with a Continuation, extending to the Pacification of Paris, in 1815* (6 Vols., Philadelphia, 1822), Volume VI, p. 33. In Alger's 'British Visitors to Paris, 1802-1803' (*EHR* 14 (October 1899)) Burdett is not listed amongst those who were known to have been introduced to Napoleon.

³⁵⁴ In *The Unfortunate Colonel Despard: The Tragic True Story of the Last Man Condemned to be Hung, Drawn and Quartered* (London, 2004), Mike Jay claims that even after Napoleon's assumption of dictatorial powers Burdett still had some faith in him as the 'Spirit of the Revolution', but it was a view that he did not espouse publicly (p. 318). In 'Godwin's *Letters of Verax*' (*JHI* 25, 3 (1964)) Pollin claims that Burdett was one of Napoleon's 'greatest defenders' (p. 364). In their notes on the papers of Francis Horner, editors Bourne and Taylor mention 'the Bonapartist sympathies expressed publicly by Burdett' in 1815 (*Horner Papers*, p. 849n).

³⁵⁵ *CPD*, Volume XI, p. 106.

³⁵⁶ *CPD*, Volume XII, p. 235.

³⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 236.

³⁵⁸ When Napoleon handed himself over to the British after Waterloo, he was brought to England on the *HMS Bellerophon* and confined to the ship when it docked at Plymouth Harbour. This prompted Burdett to remark to Romilly that 'if moving for a writ of habeas corpus would procure him his liberty, or in any way be useful to him, he would stand forward to do it'. Romilly described Burdett's concern as 'a very strange interest in [Napoleon's] fate' and advised against such a proceeding. (Romilly, S.,

Commons, 'a continuation of peace it has my concurrence',³⁵⁹ and warned against England 'interfering' in 'continental matters' as 'It is unwise at this time in particular to think of interfering we are not in a condition to interfere'.³⁶⁰ As the war dragged on, Burdett's opposition continued. In 1809, for example, he criticised the government for interfering in the internal affairs of the French people 'simply because they chose to alter their internal form of government'.³⁶¹ In January 1812 he stated that the war was the result of 'A detestation of the principles of liberty which had broken out in France'³⁶² and claimed that the resources of the country had been exhausted in order to 'prevent the oppressed from becoming free' and 'to re-harden the grasp of despotism'.³⁶³ He also remarked that 'a war against freedom, in other countries, was, in reality, a war against the people of England themselves'.³⁶⁴ In 1816 he criticised the government for having embarked upon the war with France 'not for any of the causes given out, but to prevent the people of England from recovering their constitutional rights'.³⁶⁵

In the 1810s Burdett continued to criticise the government for their invasion of liberty and their subversion of the constitution, all the while presenting himself as its defender. Throughout this period, particularly between 1815 and 1820, Britain witnessed a great deal of economic and social distress. This culminated in a series of protests, riots and uprisings - anti-Corn Law demonstrations in 1815, the Spa Fields riots of 1816, the March of the Blanketeers in 1817, the Derbyshire Uprising of 1817, the Peterloo Massacre in 1819 and the Cato Street Conspiracy of 1820. The government, fearing revolution, resorted to harsh and extreme measures in order to combat the threat, measures that Burdett regarded as unconstitutional and illegal. In June 1817, when speaking on the suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act, Burdett remarked that none of those confined under previous suspensions of the act had been

Memoirs of the Life of Sir Samuel Romilly, (3 Vols., London, 1840), Volume III, p. 191-2).

³⁵⁹ *PR*, 4th Series, Volume I, p. 133.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

³⁶¹ *CPD*, Volume XII, p. 236.

³⁶² *Ibid.*, Volume XXI, p. 19.

³⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

brought to trial and declared that 'the only persons who had broken the laws were the ministers themselves'.³⁶⁶ A month later he claimed that parliament had 'exerted themselves, not for, but against, the liberties of the country' and 'denied that there was any distress in the country, approaching to treason'.³⁶⁷ His abhorrence of the 'massacre' at St Peter's Field in August 1819 was based on his belief that it was the authorities, not the people, who had acted illegally, and it was the government who continued to violate people's rights by refusing an inquiry into the massacre. At his trial in March 1820 Burdett called Hunt's arrest on that fateful day 'an imprudent act ... calculated to produce irritation'³⁶⁸ and remarked that 'whether the meeting was legal or illegal, the manner in which it was dispersed cannot be justified'.³⁶⁹ The government's response to Peterloo, the Six Acts, horrified Burdett, as they were an attack on everything that he held dear - the freedom of speech, the freedom of the press, the right of assembly, and property rights. They were a wholesale attack on liberty and

the greatest encroachment upon the rights of the people since the time of the Revolution: so much so, that of them it might be said, that they effected in 1819 a revolution of the great principles which had been established by a revolution in 1689.³⁷⁰

Burdett believed that the government stirred up trouble in order to justify the passage of measures destructive to liberty and install arbitrary government. In December 1800 he accused the government of 'trump[ing] up new stories of plots and conspiracies'³⁷¹ in order to justify their unconstitutional actions. Particularly abhorrent to Burdett was the government's use of spies and informers, which he regarded as 'instruments of tyranny'³⁷² and 'the pests of society'.³⁷³ In April 1802 he condemned Pitt's

³⁶⁵ *The Morning Chronicle*, 12 September 1816.

³⁶⁶ *PD*, Volume XXXVI, p. 941-2.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1411-2.

³⁶⁸ *State Trials*, p. 36.

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

³⁷⁰ *PD*, New Series, Volume V, p. 738.

³⁷¹ *PR*, 3rd Series, Volume XIII, p. 518.

³⁷² *PD*, Volume XXXVI, p. 1240.

³⁷³ *Ibid.*, New Series, Volume I, p. 277.

government for having 'organised a system of spies, undermining the morality, corrupting the integrity of the nation, poisoning every source of social happiness, destroying all confidence between man and man'.³⁷⁴ In July 1812 Burdett claimed that the government 'provoked the people to ... disturbances',³⁷⁵ and complained about 'the system of employing spies to stir up and entrap and bring to punishment the unhappy people', calling it 'a system worthy of the devil alone'.³⁷⁶ He criticised the practice again in June and July 1817, claiming that 'Informers were sent through the country to rake up discontent in the haunts of misery and wretchedness'³⁷⁷ and calling the government use of spies 'odious and detestable',³⁷⁸ furious that one such agent, Oliver, had 'gone about the country introducing himself "with Sir F. Burdett's compliments"'.³⁷⁹ Burdett firmly believed that government spies found conspiracies and plots where none existed and deliberately stirred up trouble, claiming 'if they did not promote treason, their employment was at an end'.³⁸⁰ He believed that 'a hired spy ... if he could find no offence, would make it'.³⁸¹ This appeared to have been vindicated in 1820 when the details of the Cato Street Conspiracy were uncovered. In February 1820 a group of Spencean Philanthropists, led by Arthur Thistlewood, plotted to assassinate Cabinet members attending a dinner at the home of Lord Harrowby on Cato Street. The conspirators had been encouraged by Edwards, a government spy, who, after the plan had been foiled, betrayed the whereabouts of Thistlewood to the authorities. At the trial of the eleven men arrested for the conspiracy, Edwards's evidence was deemed unreliable and so he was not called to testify.³⁸² In May 1820 Alderman Wood moved for a Commons inquiry to investigate the government's role in the plot. Burdett supported the measure, believing that Edwards had instigated the conspiracy, and

blamed the government [for the conspiracy] for keeping in constant pay

³⁷⁴ *PR*, 3rd Series, Volume XVIII, p. 7.

³⁷⁵ *PD*, Volume XXIII, p. 980.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1007.

³⁷⁷ *PD*, Volume XXXVI, p. 1411.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 1245.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1069.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1070.

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1245.

³⁸² On 23 May 1820 Edwards himself was charged with High Treason. He fled the country and

a regular set of spies, who insidiously went about the country for the purpose of fomenting discontents and planning conspiracies in order to inveigle the unwary into the snares of the law.³⁸³

He claimed that the employment of spies was 'a sign of the evil of the times, and a proof that there was something wrong in the government'.³⁸⁴

The consequences of the government's subversion of the constitution and its attempts to undermine and destroy liberty disturbed Burdett. He believed that by introducing repressive measures, the government, far from protecting the country from revolution was actually placing it in danger of revolution. In May 1797 he argued that the Revolution in France had not been caused by 'The progress of reason and philosophy' but 'by the extravagance, profligacy, and insolence of its Administration', and warned that 'The same causes are operating with us'.³⁸⁵ In June 1799 Burdett reminded the House 'what had been the conduct of the nation' when the King 'by his violation of the constitution, and his disregard of the Rights of the subject, had become a monstrous delinquent', the King had 'been expelled'.³⁸⁶ In 1812 he pointed out that in Europe

Not a Sovereign there has been dethroned, not a state has there been subdued, where the way of the conqueror was not paved by corruption in government, and by the tyranny which corruption never fails, sooner or later, to call its support.³⁸⁷

Again in 1818 he noted that 'the history of the country sufficiently shewed that the violations of the fundamentally free principles of the constitution ever produced trouble and civil war'.³⁸⁸ Thus, it was essential that men like Burdett stood forward in defence of the law and the constitution in order to protect the nation from tyranny, despotism, revolution and anarchy. Burdett embraced this role wholeheartedly,

remained abroad until his death.

³⁸³ *PD*, New Series, Volume I, p. 285.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 276.

³⁸⁵ *PR*, 3rd Series, Volume II, p. 609.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, Volume IX, p. 54.

³⁸⁷ *CPD*, Volume XXI, p. 31.

³⁸⁸ *PD*, Volume XXXVIII, p. 1124.

capitalising on his image as a champion of liberty and presenting himself as a martyr to the cause. In February 1800 he declared that 'He would yet do his endeavours to stop that system of tyranny and corruption which fastened on the country'.³⁸⁹ In August 1804 at the Middlesex Election he remarked that some had referred to him as a 'wild enthusiast' and declared 'whether I am called that name or jacobin, they will not prevent me from being the protector of your rights and privileges'.³⁹⁰ In July 1812 he claimed that

He had but one design - to keep together the throne and the people, and to get rid of a system in that House inimical to both. Such had ever been, and such ever would be the systematic design of his political life.³⁹¹

In 1819 Burdett was aware that his letter condemning the government for the Peterloo Massacre would be controversial, remarking 'it may be a libel'.³⁹² However, he said that he cared not for the consequences of his actions, declaring 'a man can die but once and never better than in vindicating the laws and liberties of his country'.³⁹³ In 1830 he remarked in the House of Commons that

Early in life he came into that House in order to defend the Constitution of England He had been a convicted libeller. Yes, a convicted libeller; and he should not scruple to venture again, when he conceived that the rights and liberties of the people demanded the task.³⁹⁴

Burdett's efforts in the cause of liberty throughout his career were based not only upon his belief that the government had violated the constitution, but upon a genuine humanitarian feeling. He had entered parliament in 1796 'with the interest of Humanity strongly beating at my heart'³⁹⁵ and a wish to bring an end to all cruelty and oppression inflicted by the government on the people of Britain. This humanitarianism was reflected in his campaign for an improvement in prison

³⁸⁹ *PR*, 3rd Series, Volume X, p. 531.

³⁹⁰ *Caledonian Mercury*, 13 August 1804.

³⁹¹ *PD*, Volume XXIII, p. 1008.

³⁹² *Sir Francis Burdett to the Electors of Westminster*, 22 August 1819.

³⁹³ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁴ *PD*, New Series, Volume XXII, p. 707-9.

³⁹⁵ *Journal of Bagshaw Stevens*, p. 377. Burdett to William Bagshaw Stevens, 10 June 1796.

conditions and also in his vigorous campaigning against flogging in the armed forces. Burdett described himself as ‘a great enemy to the practice of flogging’,³⁹⁶ regarding it as another facet of coercive government. But he was also genuinely appalled by the brutality and cruelty of the practice, having himself witnessed a sentence of flogging being carried out whilst imprisoned in the Tower in 1810, and felt it was unnecessary, as it did little to improve army discipline or efficiency. Burdett first raised the issue in the House of Commons in May 1808 in response to the Local Militia Bill, which proposed to recruit the militia by ballot from the population at large and place it under martial law while on duty. Burdett objected to the measure, not because he opposed conscription,³⁹⁷ but because it would mean that ‘the British people’ would ‘be subject to a disgrace ... he meant the lash’, and he ‘would never give his consent to have the British people lashed’.³⁹⁸ Burdett described the military code, which allowed the practice of flogging as ‘the exclusive disgrace of the British army and the British nation’,³⁹⁹ and called for ‘the abolition of the disgraceful penalties attached to the condition of a British soldier’,⁴⁰⁰ refusing to support the Militia Bill until this reform took place. In June 1808 Burdett again opposed the measure, describing it as ‘oppressive and unconstitutional’.⁴⁰¹ He believed that the measure would be ‘ineffectual; harassing to the subject, and at the same time completely impotent as a measure of national defence’.⁴⁰² In June 1811 Burdett moved for an address to the Prince Regent requesting he put a stop to the practice, stating ‘the system of flogging was not essential to the discipline of the English army, and that it was as unnecessary as it was cruel and disgraceful’.⁴⁰³ He was defeated but continued to campaign for abolition, writing to the Prince Regent in October 1811 asking for his support and also speaking out against the practice in the Commons in January 1812, claiming it

³⁹⁶ *CPD*, Volume XI, p. 854.

³⁹⁷ Burdett claimed he had ‘no objection to conscription’, as ‘He could never consider it a hardship on a man to be called up to defend his home and his own country’ (*ibid.*, p. 105-6) and also because ‘the constitution of the country placed every man at the disposal of the king, to be placed in the station in which he would be most wanted to resist the enemy in case of invasion’ (*ibid.*, p. 107).

³⁹⁸ *CPD*, Volume XI, p. 106.

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 853.

⁴⁰² *Ibid.*

⁴⁰³ *Ibid.*, Volume XX, p. 699.

'oppressed the country'.⁴⁰⁴ In March 1812 Burdett moved for a complete abolition of flogging but was again unsuccessful. However, some small victories were secured from Burdett's exertions. On 25 March 1812, the Duke of York⁴⁰⁵ issued a circular to commanding officers recommending alternatives to flogging be used. Also, in 1813 courts were given the option to commute the punishment to indefinite service abroad and in 1815 the judge advocate general, Charles Manners-Sutton, ruled that the practice of carrying out the punishment by instalments was illegal. In the 1820s and early 1830s the campaign was taken up by Joseph Hume, whose efforts Burdett supported. He continued to oppose the practice but did not take the lead in the campaign himself during this period, being more occupied with Catholic Emancipation and Parliamentary Reform. Likewise, Burdett continued to show an interest in the plight of political prisoners throughout the 1820s and 1830s but did not take a leading role in any prison reform campaign. Nevertheless, these humanitarian campaigns in which Burdett involved himself in the 1800s and 1810s were an important means by which he could further expose the government as the tyrannical enemy of liberty, while presenting himself as a champion of liberty and a defender of the constitution.

III

The events of the first two and a half decades of Burdett's parliamentary career and his clashes with the government over issues concerning liberty and the constitution created two powerful but opposing images of him. For his opponents, Burdett's outspokenness, his radical oratorical style, and his connections with leading radical figures was indicative of a dangerous extremist who abhorred parliamentary government and wanted to overthrow the existing constitution, replacing it with one based on democratic values. Lord Holland, for example, presented Burdett as a man who was deeply hostile towards parliament, particularly the House of Commons, remarking that his 'opinions, whenever they were intelligible, were equally repugnant

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., Volume XXI, p. 22.

⁴⁰⁵ Re-instated as Commander in Chief of the Army by Perceval in May 1811.

to reason and subversive of all free or, at least, of all Parliamentary Government'.⁴⁰⁶ Conversely, Burdett's supporters and admirers regarded him as a defender of the constitution; a man who wanted to restore the ancient law of the land, not install a new system of government. He was regularly celebrated as 'the champion of the people's rights and liberties'.⁴⁰⁷ In *The Spirit of the Age* (1825) William Hazlitt described Burdett's 'love of liberty' as 'pure ... warm and steady' and remarked that 'He is never violent or in extremes, except when the people or the parliament happen to be out of their senses',⁴⁰⁸ which presumably Burdett thought parliament was on the several occasions on which he challenged them.

Burdett earned his radical reputation early in his career. Before he had even entered parliament, in October 1796, Burdett had already acquired a reputation for his radical views and impulsive style. In April 1794 the Burdett family chaplain, William Bagshaw Stevens, reported in his diary that one of his friends who had met Burdett complained of 'the violence of his Political Opinions'.⁴⁰⁹ Burdett's grandfather, Sir Robert Burdett, the fourth baronet, was also concerned about his grandson's political views. Bagshaw Stevens reported in March 1793 that 'His Grandson's virtues are above the reach of [Sir Robert's] comprehension. His Patriotism he dreads and deprecates'.⁴¹⁰ Although initially these views were confined to the family circle, the Coutts family, into whom Burdett married in 1793, were well connected in London and it is likely that reports of his behaviour travelled through these networks. These opinions were encouraged by the events of Burdett's early parliamentary career, a period during which his attacks on the government were frequent and unrestrained. He was regularly called to order, gaining a reputation as a firebrand and giving many the impression that he was a violent revolutionary who advocated the overthrow of the government. In November 1800 William Wilberforce described one of Burdett's parliamentary speeches, in which he criticised the government's conduct of the war,

⁴⁰⁶ Lord Holland, *Further Memoirs of the Whig Party, 1807-1821* (London, 1905), p. 102-3.

⁴⁰⁷ *The Times*, 3 September 1819.

⁴⁰⁸ Hazlitt, W., *The Spirit of the Age*, 1825, pp. 229-30.

⁴⁰⁹ *Journal of Bagshaw Stevens*, p. 146.

⁴¹⁰ *PR*, 3rd Series, Volume XIII., p. 71.

condemned its treatment of the Irish and attributed 'the present distressed state of the people' to 'the politics of Ministers',⁴¹¹ as 'hostile ... to all administration - to all government - to all system - to all order in civil society'.⁴¹² Even the King had a comment to make on Burdett's behaviour during this period, remarking to the Prime Minister, Henry Addington, in July 1802 'Sir Francis Burdett is not guided by any rules of propriety'.⁴¹³ These feelings were fuelled by Burdett's close friendship with veteran radical John Horne Tooke, his involvement with Irish radicals Arthur O'Connor and Colonel Despard,⁴¹⁴ and by his connections with radical groups such as the London Corresponding Society (LCS). In 1804 Burdett was accused of using 'many inflammatory, and almost treasonable, expressions' in his 'club and tavern speeches'⁴¹⁵ and criticised for his 'public conduct', which was 'highly offensive to all classes of Society'.⁴¹⁶ He was also accused of having 'the most rancorous hostility to the existing government of his country'.⁴¹⁷

In 1837 one commentator noted that Burdett would be remembered 'for the extreme democracy of his early tenets'.⁴¹⁸ Indeed, it was Burdett's actions and associations in the early period of his career that established his reputation as a radical,⁴¹⁹ and the events thereafter, particularly his arrest in 1810, that cemented it in the minds of his opponents. His involvement in the campaign to improve prison conditions, for example, created the impression that Burdett was in league with revolutionaries and mutineers. Similarly, his involvement in the Duke of York affair in 1809 seemed to

⁴¹¹ Ibid., p. 39.

⁴¹² Ibid., p. 255. Burdett responded that he 'had been the object of that honourable gentleman's dark insinuations, and indirect attacks' on previous occasions, and looked upon them with 'sovereign contempt' (Ibid).

⁴¹³ Aspinall, A. (ed.), *The Later Correspondence of George III* (5 Vols., Cambridge, 1962-70), Volume IV, p. 44.

⁴¹⁴ See Chapter 2 for an in depth discussion of Burdett's involvement with Irish radicalism.

⁴¹⁵ Hankin, E., *A letter to Sir F. Burdett, Bart., on the folly, indecency, and dangerous tendency of his public conduct*, London, 1804, p. 1.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid., p. 43.

⁴¹⁷ *A Letter to the Freeholders of Middlesex; containing an examination of the objections made to the return at the close of the late Middlesex election; and remarks on the political character and conduct of Sir Francis Burdett, Bart. by an attentive observer*, London, 1804, p. 88.

⁴¹⁸ Cooke, G. W., *The History of Party; from the rise of the Whig and Tory factions in the reign of Charles II to the passing of the Reform Bill, Volume III, 1762-1832*, London, 1837, pp. 447-8.

⁴¹⁹ The period 1796 to 1802 was the most 'radical' phase of Burdett's career. See Chapter 2.

provide evidence of his radical and anti-monarchical attitude. The publication of Burdett's condemnation of the government for their arrest of Gale Jones, his attempts to resist arrest in 1810 and the resulting disturbances in the street, which lasted for several days in April and were revived upon his release from the Tower on 21 June, seemed to confirm fears that he was a dangerous demagogue and trouble-maker. In *The Courier* Samuel Taylor Coleridge described Burdett's letter to his constituents as 'a regular charge, and impeachment of the House of Commons ... a systematic attempt to render it perfectly odious in the estimation of the people ... little short of a wish to introduce plain anarchy'.⁴²⁰ On 28 March 1810 the Prime Minister, Spencer Perceval, notified the King that proceedings against Burdett had been adjourned out of 'fear of Sr. F. Burdett & his followers'.⁴²¹ On 8 April the King replied that he 'sincerely lament[ed] that the violent and misguided conduct of Sir Francis Burdett should have led to transactions so disorderly & embarrassing'.⁴²² On the same day, at St. Margaret's Church, Westminster, the preacher claimed in his sermon that 'the bloody Banner of Sedition was unfurled'⁴²³ by the riots on Burdett's account. Lord Holland, while criticising the Commons' imprisonment of Burdett as an 'ill-timed execution of an arbitrary power',⁴²⁴ condemned Burdett for 'yet more flagrant conduct' and noted that the House 'could not with decency overlook' such behaviour.⁴²⁵ Samuel Romilly remarked that Burdett's letter to the Speaker of the Commons was 'couched in very indecent and insolent terms, and manifestly written to provoke his expulsion from the House'.⁴²⁶ Samuel Taylor Coleridge also deprecated the trouble Burdett had caused, writing in his notebooks in April 1810 'Sir F. B. like a Lapland Witch drowned in a storm of her own raising'.⁴²⁷ The reference is to the works of playwright and poet Sir Charles D'Avenant (1606-1668) who claimed that orators stirred up sedition rather than promoting good government. Coleridge later

⁴²⁰ Erdman, D. V. (ed.), *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge 3: Essays on His Times in The Morning Post and The Courier* (London, 1978), Volume III, p. 105-10.

⁴²¹ Aspinall, op. cit., Volume V, p. 549.

⁴²² Ibid., Volume V, p. 506.

⁴²³ Farington, J., *The Diary of Joseph Farington*, Yale University Press, 1979, p. 3630.

⁴²⁴ Lord Holland, *Further Memoirs of the Whig Party, 1807-1821*, John Murray, 1905, p. 50.

⁴²⁵ Ibid., p. 49.

⁴²⁶ Romilly, S., *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Samuel Romilly*, John Murray, London, 1840, Volume II, p. 318-9.

claimed that the actions of ‘the insensate Seditious-Bawlers, Burdett and his leprous Ragamuffians’ had actually damaged the cause of liberty by deterring ‘wise & respectable men from daring to interfere by the Press in cases that really need watchfulness and reprehension’.⁴²⁸

The affair was the subject of talk all over the country, earning Burdett widespread notoriety, as many living in London commented on the troubles in letters to their friends and loved ones. In one such letter the author doubted Burdett’s sanity, remarking

You know I have always been afraid of the Violence of his Conduct I think he must have a Twist in his Brain, you remember the rashness of his Brother, who threw away his life in attempting to push a Boat across a Water fall of immense force called the fall of the Rhine a spirit of daring much beyond what could be called courage for there was not a possibility of escaping instant Destruction.⁴²⁹

A friend of the Reverend William Morgan Whalley, a Gloucestershire minister, wrote that his visit to London was ‘a good deal destroyed by these riots on Sir F. Burdett’s account’.⁴³⁰ At the end of July the same friend commented that he did ‘not intend leaving the house’ as it was ‘too likely that so small a creature as a caterpillar would be crushed in the crowd’.⁴³¹ One account of Burdett’s arrest described the mob as being

assembled in great force in Piccadilly and some of the adjoined streets. One Lifeguard man was wounded and 18 of the mob were sent wounded to the Hospitals. The windows of Sir John Anstruther’s House, and Mr. Percival’s, L[or]d Castlereagh and many others were broken and the shutter irons injured, and at L[or]d C[astlereagh]’s they attempted to

⁴²⁷ Coburn, K. (ed.), *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, London, 1957-73, Volume III, 3772.

⁴²⁸ *Ibid.*, 4079.

⁴²⁹ Doncaster Archives Department, Papers of Battie-Wrightson of Cusworth, DD/BW/F7/28. William Wrightson to Mrs E. Bland, 12 April 1810. Burdett’s brother Charles Sedley Burdett was drowned in Switzerland in October 1793.

⁴³⁰ Gloucestershire Record Office, Bowly Family Collection, Whalley Family, D4582/5/4. ‘J. B.’ to Rev. W. M. Whalley, 8 April 1810.

force their way in.⁴³²

A large number of troops were dispatched to deal with the escalating violence. 'Piccadilly ... had two lines of cavalry from St James Street to Stratton Street' and 'Artillery, and field guns were plac'd in Berkeley, and in Grosvenor, and 2 in Cavendish Squares'.⁴³³ There were also rumours that Burdett 'w[oul]d not submit to be taken by the Serjeant at Arms, but if they should think proper to send an *Armed force* He would surrender Himself to it',⁴³⁴ creating the impression that Burdett wanted to stir up further trouble. Upon being taken by force to the Tower on 9 April, Burdett was 'guarded by 3 Regiments of Cavalry with their swords drawn'.⁴³⁵ Crowds continued to gather outside Burdett's house and in the following days troops were attacked with stones and shots were fired. 'Tulmultary mobs, public meetings, inflammatory resolutions and addresses, continued to produce agitation and alarm for some time in the metropolis and great towns'.⁴³⁶

This perception of Burdett as a rabble-rouser and dangerous demagogue in his own lifetime existed alongside his other image as a champion of liberty and defender of the constitution. Burdett had also acquired this image early on in his political career, and it was one that captured the public imagination. In 1803 Burdett was described as 'the representative' of 'the British Constitution'.⁴³⁷ In 1804 a Middlesex freeholder writing to his fellow electors noted that, unlike his rival candidate, George Boulton Mainwaring,⁴³⁸ Burdett was a known enemy of corruption and 'a steady opponent to the invasion of our liberty and security by either foreign or domestic enemies'.⁴³⁹ Another claimed that Burdett had 'the most manly and generous attachment to the

⁴³¹ Ibid., 'J. B.' to Rev. W. M. Whalley, no date.

⁴³² TNA, PRO30/43/25. Account of the Arrest of Sir Francis Burdett.

⁴³³ Ibid.

⁴³⁴ *Farington Diary*, p. 3628.

⁴³⁵ Ibid.

⁴³⁶ Wallace, W., *The History of the Life and Reign of George the Fourth* (3 Vols., London, 1831), Volume II, p. 132.

⁴³⁷ Phillips, R., *Public Characters of 1802-1803* (London, 1803), p. 499.

⁴³⁸ George Boulton Mainwaring had never sat in parliament before and so voters were unsure of his commitment, if any, to the defence of liberty. His father, however, William Mainwaring, who was Burdett's opponent in the 1802 Middlesex Election, was known for his reactionary views, which made many suspicious of the motives of his son.

⁴³⁹ *Middlesex Election 1804*, p. 9.

Constitution' and 'anxiously wishes that every individual may enjoy its blessings'.⁴⁴⁰ On recommending that Burdett be appointed to the House of Commons Finance Committee in June 1807, Lord Grey remarked that Burdett 'stands forward as the enemy of public abuses'.⁴⁴¹ Burdett was also celebrated in verse:

For Burdett then, brave patriots, your suffrages bring,
Undaunted he'll combat fell tyranny's sling.
Unbribd by a pension, or share in a loan,
Your rights he'll maintain, though he stands up alone.⁴⁴²

Prints of the period played upon Burdett's reputation as a champion of liberty. Williams's *Two Pair of Candidates Proposed to the Electors of Middlesex* (12 July 1802) shows Burdett and Byng as the 'Enemies to Austerity and Oppression', standing behind a rail inscribed 'Liberty and Independence'. Burdett holds up a 'Motion to suppress Bastilles and all rigourous treatment' and remarks 'I'll never desert the Poor or Parliamentary Reform'.⁴⁴³ *The M-dd-x El-c-n, Or John Bull taking a Bolus against his will* (13 August 1804) shows John being with his arms pinned back by Thomas Aris, Governor of Coldbath Fields Prison, being forced to eat G. B. Mainwaring. John exclaims 'Mercy Gentlemen this is too much for my constitution! nothing can save me but Sr F B-----t as a digester'.⁴⁴⁴ Williams's *The Triumph of Independence over Ministerial Influence and Corruption* (8 March 1805) Burdett, who is holding a piece of paper behind his back entitled 'Constitution of England', says to Mainwaring, 'Go Hireling return to thy original Nothingness nor suffer Ministerial Influence to hold thee up as ridicule again, nor dare oppose the Legitimate Choice of the Electors of Middlesex'.⁴⁴⁵ In Isaac Cruikshank's *Tree of Corruption - every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good is hewen down* (April 1809) Burdett is shown chopping down the 'Tree of Corruption', the branches of which have labels such as 'placemen', 'pensioners', 'tax, tax' and 'East India Company'. His axe

⁴⁴⁰ *The Times*, 24 July 1804.

⁴⁴¹ *CPD*, Volume IX, p. 714. The Committee debated Burdett's suitability as a candidate for the Committee for an hour before rejecting him.

⁴⁴² Doncaster Archives Department, Papers of Battie-Wrightson of Cusworth, DD/BW/P/180 [undated]. See Appendix 8.

⁴⁴³ BMS 9878. See Appendix 9.

⁴⁴⁴ BMS 10266. See Appendix 10.

is inscribed 'Voice of ye People'.⁴⁴⁶ Burdett himself cultivated and capitalised on this image, using it to great effect in parliament, during election campaigns and at public meetings, where he regularly spoke of his desire to protect liberty and restore the constitution.⁴⁴⁷

Burdett's admirers celebrated the events of 1810 as a demonstration of his love of liberty and evidence of his role as a champion of the constitution. Some actually commended him for his moderation. Samuel Whitbread, for example, remarked that 'the language of the Hon. Baronet was perfectly justifiable. Much stronger language had been used in the case of Mr. Wilkes, and by Mr. Burke'.⁴⁴⁸ In *The Monthly Repository* the authorities were criticised for breaking into Burdett's house to arrest him, an action which was 'by no means consistent with the laws of the land'.⁴⁴⁹ Burdett, meanwhile, was praised for his moderate conduct:

He moved about as he used to do at other times, neither courting an opportunity of resistance, nor secreting himself. He kept the doors of his house shut, as every man has a right to do against those whom he does not choose to admit.⁴⁵⁰

Burdett himself was keen to point out in his letter that what he demanded was not revolution but justice, remarking 'we need no better security, no more powerful protection for our Rights and Liberties, than the Law and Constitution. We seek for, and we need seek for, *nothing new*'.⁴⁵¹ In the prints Burdett was fêted as the champion of liberty. In Heath's *Modern St George attacking the Monster of Despotism* (April 1810) Burdett is depicted as the saint attacking the monster, which has the head of the Prime Minister, Spencer Perceval, and five other MPs. The Monster is shown trampling upon the Habeas Corpus Act and the Petition of Right, while Burdett protects himself with a shield emblazoned with the words 'Magna

⁴⁴⁵ BMS 10372. See Appendix 11.

⁴⁴⁶ BMS 11323. See Appendix 12.

⁴⁴⁷ See section II above on Burdett's commitment to liberty and the constitution throughout his career.

⁴⁴⁸ *The Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle*, 9 April 1810.

⁴⁴⁹ *The Monthly Repository of Theology and General Literature*, 2 April 1810.

⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵¹ *Burdett to his constituents*, 1810, p. 7.

Carta' and 'Bill of Rights'. He declares 'I will stand up for the Rights of the People or Perish in the Attempt'.⁴⁵² Rowlandson's *The Borough-Mongers Strangled in the Tower* (April 1810) shows Burdett throttling two figures representing 'corrupt representation' and 'unlawful privilege'. In the top right hand corner an extract from Burdett's parliamentary speech is shown.⁴⁵³ In Williams's *A New Cure for Jacobinism or a Peep in the Tower* (April 1810) Burdett is in a cage marked 'The Wonderful Wild Man from the West the Greatest Wonder in the World'. He is trying to pass through the bars of his cage a copy of the Magna Carta. The guide remarks that he is 'particularly savage at the sight of a Prime Minister or Speakers Wig, he is ungovernable at the sight of Placemen and Pensioners ... he raves much about a thing called Magna Charty'. One of the spectators remarks 'Bless Me!! How mad he is!'.⁴⁵⁴ Another Williams print, *The Political Sampson or Philistines in Danger* (May 1810), shows Burdett, flanked by Wardle and Cochrane, toppling the pillars of 'Corrupt Representation' and 'Unlawful Privileges' which support a balcony occupied by ministers and judges.⁴⁵⁵ In Heath's *A Model for Patriots or an Independent Legislator* (10 April 1810) Burdett is shown wearing a laurel crown and standing on a 'Rock of Integrity', against which crashes waves of 'discord', 'disunion', 'intolerance', 'imbecility' and 'rashness'. Demonic sea creatures surround the rock spitting jets of 'spite' and 'envy' at Burdett, from whom shines rays of 'patriotism', 'popularity' and 'perserverance'. Upon rock itself is a list of virtues, such as 'Good Father', 'Good Landlord' and 'Good Moral Character',⁴⁵⁶ as well as a list of what Burdett stands for, 'Magna Carta', 'Bill of Rights', 'the Laws of the Country & Constitution'. Burdett is celebrated as 'A Determined Enemy to Persecution

⁴⁵² Bod., John Johnson Political and Satirical Prints Collection, Political Cartoons 2 (68). See Appendix 13.

⁴⁵³ BMS 11551. See Appendix 14.

⁴⁵⁴ Bod., John Johnson Political and Satirical Prints Collection, Political Cartoons 2 (66). See Appendix 15. In a similar print *British Zoology or Tower Curiosities* Williams depicts Burdett as a bird in a cage. The Tower guard describes him to the visitors as 'an extraordinary Bird, it has been fluttering and croaking around Middlesex and Westminster to the great annoyance of his Majesty's Loyal Subjects' (Ibid., Political Cartoons 2 (67)). See Appendix 6.

⁴⁵⁵ BMS 11560. See Appendix 16.

⁴⁵⁶ This was printed before the details of Burdett's affair with Lady Oxford and the illegitimate child it produced had been publicised.

Corruption Oppression ...& every Encroachment on MAGNA CHARTA'.⁴⁵⁷ Williams's *Genial Rays, or John Bull enjoying the Sunshine* (June 1810) shows John Bull gazing up at the sun, in which is enclosed a profile of Burdett. The rays of light coming from Burdett are inscribed 'Magna Carta', 'King and Constitution', 'Loyalty', 'Reform', 'Good of the People', 'Integrity', 'Laws of the Land', 'Trial by Jury', 'Lords', 'Habea[s Corpus]', 'Liberty', 'Candour', 'Justice', 'Truth', 'Freedom of the Pr[ess]', 'Bill of Rights', 'Commons' and 'Free Representation'. John remarks 'when the welfare of our country calls ... the great Patriot shines'.⁴⁵⁸ *Pride of Britain* (June 1810), another print by Williams, shows Burdett, being wreathed with laurels, standing on the dome of the temple of 'Truth and Independence'. In his hand he holds a document entitled 'Magna Carta' and behind him a winged demon holding a dagger is struck by lightning. At Burdett's feet is the word 'Popularity'. Underneath the print is a verse about Burdett which declares 'Freedom's cause and Liberty he loves' and describes him as 'Honest', 'Fearles', and the 'people's friend'.⁴⁵⁹ It was rare for a public figure to be idolised in the prints in this way, but for a few months in 1810 Burdett was celebrated in the prints as a hero of justice and the champion of liberty. A series of commemorative coins, one of which describes Burdett as 'The Intrepid Champion of Freedom, The Enlightened Advocate of the Rights and Liberties of the People', and even pottery, was also produced to celebrate Burdett's release from the Tower.

Understandably, comparisons were made between Burdett and another famous

⁴⁵⁷ Bod., John Johnson Political and Satirical Prints Collection, Political Cartoons 2 (71). See Appendix 17.

⁴⁵⁸ BMS 11563. See Appendix 18.

⁴⁵⁹ BMS 11562. See Appendix 19. The entire verse reads as follows:

Here stands a Man True to his Country's Cause,
 Who dares confute Despotism Laws,
 Maintain a peoples right and nobly proves,
 How Freedom's cause and Liberty he loves,
 Staunch to his Trust their Charter he'l defend,
 A hail'd by all, a gratefull people's Friend,
 No force can bend him to a Despots will,
 Honest he started and remains so still,
 Fearles he dreads not proud Oppressions rod,
 An Honest Man's the noblest work of God.

champion of liberty, John Wilkes (1725-1797). Wilkes, MP for Aylesbury, first came to prominence through his publication, the *North Briton*, in which he frequently criticised George III's favourite Lord Bute. In April 1763 Wilkes was arrested for seditious libel for issue number 45 of the *North Briton*, in which he heavily criticised ministers for the Treaty of Paris, which had ended the Seven Years War and was regarded by the parliamentary opposition as being far too generous towards the French. The affair captured the public imagination, with Wilkes attracting a great deal of public support. Wilkite mobs rampaged through the streets of London and cries of 'Wilkes and Liberty!' were heard all over the capital. In December 1763 Wilkes fled to France. In his absence he was expelled from the House of Commons, found guilty of libel and in November 1764 outlawed. In 1768 Wilkes returned to Britain and in March was elected as MP for Middlesex, after an effective and well organised campaign, which saw large crowds intimidate Wilkes's opponents. However, as Wilkes had yet to be punished for his 1764 crimes and was likely to be imprisoned, he was soon expelled from the House. On 27 April Wilkes surrendered himself to custody but was freed by the mob. In June his status as an outlaw was revoked by he was sentenced to three years for libel and taken to King's Bench Prison. Despite this, Wilkes was re-elected to Middlesex in three subsequent by-elections but his election was declared void each time, until eventually, in April 1769, the House declared his opponent elected. The decision was enormously controversial, both in the Commons and the country as a whole, and contributed to the resignation of Grafton as Prime Minister in January 1770. The whole affair made Wilkes a popular hero.

The similarities between Wilkes and Burdett are obvious. Both had been MPs for Middlesex, both had had their elections voided. Both had clashed with the House of Commons in highly publicised cases concerning the rights and liberties of the subject. Both were supported by the City of London authorities. During the London riots occasioned by Wilkes' arrest in 1763, cries of 'Wilkes and Liberty' were heard throughout the capital. 'Burdett for ever'⁴⁶⁰ was heard throughout London in 1810,

⁴⁶⁰ *New Annual Register 1810*, London, 1811, p. 52; *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, 7 April 1810; *The Morning Chronicle*, 7 April 1810; *The Examiner*, 8 April 1810.

and the crowds displayed banners with the slogan 'Burdett and freedom'.⁴⁶¹ During his case, Wilkes had challenged the legality of the general warrant under which he and forty-eight others were arrested. Burdett also challenged the legality of the warrant under which he was arrested, as it was issued by the Speaker of the House of Commons, not a recognised legal authority.⁴⁶² Finally, both Wilkes and Burdett supported freedom of speech, freedom of the press, religious toleration and parliamentary reform. Historians have also commented on the resemblance between the careers of the two men. The Bewleys describe the crowds gathered at the Middlesex election in 1802 as having 'rivalled the days of Wilkes'.⁴⁶³ Similarly, Royle and Walvin describe Burdett's unseating from Middlesex in 1804 as being 'reminiscent of the Wilkes affair',⁴⁶⁴ and compare Burdett's clash with parliament in 1810 with the Wilkes affair of 1763, remarking that the similarities between the two 'ended only when the government wisely refused to declare Burdett's seat vacant'.⁴⁶⁵ They also claim that 'like Wilkes' Burdett 'had the ability to seize on issues which would feed his popularity'.⁴⁶⁶ Harris claims as a result of the events of 1810 Burdett was 'at the height of his popularity, and was as much the hero of the hour as Wilkes had ever been. His name was on every tongue, his portrait in every house, his praises in every popular print'.⁴⁶⁷ Also commenting on 1810, Rudé remarks that the Common Hall's petition to parliament, which protested against Burdett's imprisonment, condemned their attacks on liberty and called for radical reform, 'revived memories of Wilkes'.⁴⁶⁸ Cannon accuses Burdett of being a 'Wilkes *manqué*',⁴⁶⁹ while Thompson believes that Burdett 'consciously modelled his tactics upon Wilkes',⁴⁷⁰ particularly during the 1804 election campaign. Belchem described

⁴⁶¹ *New Annual Register 1810*, London, 1811, p. 76.

⁴⁶² Burdett's letter to the Speaker declared 'Your warrant, Sir, I believe you know it to be illegal. I know it to be so' (*CPD*, Volume XVI, p. 550).

⁴⁶³ Bewley, *op. cit.*, p. 218.

⁴⁶⁴ Royle, E., and Walvin, J., *English Radicals and Reformers 1760-1848* (Brighton, 1982), p. 95.

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

⁴⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 95-6.

⁴⁶⁷ Harris, W., *The History of the Radical Party in Parliament* (London, 1885), p. 100.

⁴⁶⁸ Rudé, G., *Hanoverian London 1714-1808* (London, 1971), p. 247.

⁴⁶⁹ Cannon, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

⁴⁷⁰ Thompson, E. P. *The Making of the English Working Class* (London, 1963), p. 498.

Burdett as 'the Wilkite heir'⁴⁷¹ and also claimed Burdett had 'Wilkite theatricality'⁴⁷² about him. Stevenson remarks that Burdett 'brought to electoral politics a degree of popular enthusiasm which had not been seen in the capital since the days of Wilkes'⁴⁷³ and claims that the events of 1810 'marked a revival of the Wilkes situation in the 1760s, especially in so far as popular enthusiasm was focused on a particular individual'.⁴⁷⁴ However, he also notes that 'Burdett was no Wilkes',⁴⁷⁵ because he was not willing to risk the consequences of being the darling of the mob as was demonstrated by his refusal to join the celebratory procession in 1810.

For Burdett's supporters the similarities between him and Wilkes were something to be celebrated. Many were keen to present him as the libertarian successor to Wilkes. For example, at a meeting of Burdett's supporters in St. Pancras on 22 August 1804 one of the speakers remarked that

The country was rescued by that illustrious patriot and accomplished scholar [Wilkes]; but his part on the theatre of life was no sooner terminated, his friends and partisans had no sooner dropped into their graves, than the interest of the dependent and avaricious Justices was established. It was in this situation that this gallant youth [Burdett] discovered the county of Middlesex, when he boldly stood forward for the protection of private feeling and public honour.⁴⁷⁶

Electioneering Squibs of the same year noted that

The two present candidates for the county of Middlesex, spliced together, would make up a complete JOHNNY WILKES, for one [Mainwaring] squints most terribly, and the other [Burdett] is a staunch defender of the liberties of the subject.⁴⁷⁷

⁴⁷¹ Belchem, J. C., 'Henry Hunt and the Evolution of the Mass Platform', *EHR* 93 (October 1978), p. 740.

⁴⁷² Belchem, J. C., 'Republicanism, Popular Constitutionalism and the Radical Platform in Early Nineteenth-Century England', *Social History* 6 (January 1981), p. 3.

⁴⁷³ Stevenson, J., *Popular Disturbances in England 1700-1870* (London, 1979), p. 184.

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 189.

⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁶ *The Times*, 23 August 1804.

⁴⁷⁷ *Middlesex Election 1804*, p. 4.

A few years after his death, one work described Burdett as ‘a Wilkes, without so large a measure of cowardice, meanness, turbulence, or rottenness of character and principle’.⁴⁷⁸ Burdett’s case against the Commons in 1810 brought further comparisons with Wilkes. In the House of Commons, for example, Ponsonby remarked ‘The case of Mr. Wilkes cannot be out of your recollection; the present is nearly similar’.⁴⁷⁹ In April 1810 Cambridge clergyman John Hammond wrote to Unitarian writer William Frend,

The imprisonment of Mr. Wilkes settled the question of general warrants; and that of Sir Francis will, by the blessing of God, be the means of renovating the constitution and re-establishing our liberties. The prayers and blessing of every honest man in the kingdom attend him and his righteous cause. It is owing to such men that we sit under our wine and fig tree in the enjoyment of liberty and peace.⁴⁸⁰

However, for those more suspicious of Burdett’s motives, the resemblances between him and Wilkes were far more ominous. In *Cobbett’s Annual Register* in July 1802 it was noted that Burdett’s election campaign had caused disturbances in Middlesex similar to those caused by Wilkes’s electoral campaigns, although they had not ‘yet produced half so much noise and mischief’.⁴⁸¹ Burdett’s dedication to the radical cause was then placed in question, as in view of ‘the latter part of Wilkes’s life’ it was possible that Burdett would yet become ‘a very tractable and even a very loyal gentleman’.⁴⁸² In 1810 Burdett was criticised in *The Aberdeen Journal* as ‘an idol of the mob - in short, the John Wilkes of the day’.⁴⁸³

Burdett’s own opinion of Wilkes is unclear. However, his statement to electors on the second day of the 1804 election suggests that he was keen to distance himself from any association with him. Upon hearing that Burdett’s majority over Mainwaring was

⁴⁷⁸ Stanton, H. B., *Sketches of Reforms and Reformers, of Great Britain and Ireland* (New York, 1850), p. 162.

⁴⁷⁹ *The Leeds Mercury*, 14 April 1810.

⁴⁸⁰ Cambridge University Library, Frend Papers, Add MSS 7886-7. John Hammond to William Frend, 24 April 1810.

⁴⁸¹ *Cobbett’s Annual Register*, 17 July 1802.

⁴⁸² *Ibid.*

forty-five, the crowd cheered to hear Wilkes's number. Burdett told them 'Mr. Wilkes deserted your cause, I will not'.⁴⁸⁴ It is possible that Burdett opposed comparisons between himself and Wilkes because while Burdett was financially, and therefore politically, independent, and prided himself on this, Wilkes often found himself with crippling debts and was dependent upon the charity of others.⁴⁸⁵ There was also many other differences between the two men - in style, attitude and outlook - ensuring that Burdett would have been keen to avoid comparison. Wilkes had a libertine reputation, whereas Burdett, despite his indiscretion with Lady Oxford, prided himself on being a family man of upstanding character. Burdett played upon his role as a country gentleman, often speaking of his love of hunting⁴⁸⁶ and the countryside; Wilkes on the other hand was very much an urban politician. Burdett often spoke in an inflammatory tone but did not resort to vulgarity or insulting language. Wilkes's publications, for example the *Essay on Woman*, were often both obscene and offensive. Moreover, attached to Wilkes was the stigma of being a turncoat, hardly an attractive connection for any politician. It is also possible that Burdett's disapproval of Wilkes was something he acquired from Horne Tooke, who had been a supporter of Wilkes and played an important role in his election to Middlesex in 1768. However, disputes over the payment of Wilkes's debts meant that the two men had become bitter enemies by the 1770s.

By the late 1810s it was Burdett's status as a champion of liberty and defender of the constitution, rather than his reputation as a dangerous radical demagogue, that had become the more dominant public perception of him.⁴⁸⁷ In Isaac Cruikshank's *The*

⁴⁸³ *The Aberdeen Journal*, 18 April 1810.

⁴⁸⁴ *Middlesex Election 1804*, p. 21.

⁴⁸⁵ In *Adultery and Patriotism. A Short Letter to Sir Francis Burdett, Bart. M.P. With a Long Postscript by an Elector of Westminster, and one of his Constituents* (1811) the author compares Burdett to Wilkes and asks whether the Baronet will end up accepting an income from the administration and dying a pensioner like Wilkes, concluding that Burdett's own wealth would probably ensure that he remained independent.

⁴⁸⁶ The practice of hunting was closely linked with the Country Party of the seventeenth century because of it represented a close relationship with the land and traditional values.

⁴⁸⁷ Burdett continued to be depicted as a dangerous revolutionary in some prints of the early 1820s, particularly those by George Cruikshanks. However, as he breach with the radical reformers became apparent, it was his reputation as a defender of liberty that became dominant. See Chapter 3, Section III.

Champion of Westminster defending the People from Ministerial Imps and Reptiles (7 July 1818) Burdett is defending the people of the 'land of misery and oppression' from the monsters of 'The Pit of Infamy', on whom shines the sun of 'Royal Favor'. His breastplate is marked 'independence' and 'honour' while his belt is labelled 'Magna Carta'. His flaming sword is inscribed with the names of other radicals: Wooler, Cartwright, Kinnaird, Hone, Wood and Waithman. Burdett is trampling on the snake of 'corruption' and is poised to strike the other beasts of 'cowardice', 'gluttony', 'pride', 'luxury', and 'treachery'.⁴⁸⁸ Another print, Rowlandson's *A Rough Sketch of the Times as Deleniated by Sir Francis Burdett*, originally released in May 1810 but reissued in 1819, shows Burdett, wearing a sash inscribed 'Magna Carta', standing between two men, the 'Genius of Honour and Integrity' and 'The Monster of Corruption'. He holds the hand of the former and points towards the latter exclaiming 'Look here upon this picture, then on this, and then Judge for Yourselves'.⁴⁸⁹ This image of Burdett, as a champion of liberty and freedom and an enemy of corruption, was enhanced by his condemnation of the government for their attack on the innocent people gathered at St Peter's Field in Manchester in August 1819. One would expect Burdett's letter criticising the government for the Peterloo Massacre to have incurred widespread censure, in a similar way as his publication of 1810 had. But, while the government were offended by the letter, and prosecuted Burdett for libel, its contents did not incite the same extreme reaction as that of 1810. Neither did plans for a public meeting in Westminster on 2 September create panic amongst the City authorities. Although placards pasted up around London advertising a public meeting in Westminster on 30 August did caused the authorities some alarm, as it called 'Britons to Arms!',⁴⁹⁰ it was doubted that Burdett and his associates were responsible. *The Times* remarked, 'we need scarcely say, that it is impossible that this inflammatory trash can have proceeded from Sir Francis Burdett or his Committee'.⁴⁹¹ One man found posting the placards was arrested, the local magistracy were placed on the alert and the Foot and Life Guards called in. However, the gentleman arrested was

⁴⁸⁸ BMS 13002. See Appendix 20.

⁴⁸⁹ BMS 11553. See Appendix 21.

⁴⁹⁰ *The Derby Mercury*, 2 September 1819.

⁴⁹¹ *The Times*, 28 August 1819.

quickly released and at the meeting itself, which was actually held on 2 September, the authorities did not intervene. Horse Guards and constables were out in the area but, despite there being many thousands present at the meeting,⁴⁹² there was 'no parade whatever of the civil or military power in the vicinity of the assembled multitude'.⁴⁹³

There are two possible reasons for the government's lack of concern. Firstly, the potential trouble that might be caused by Burdett's letter and his meeting in Westminster was merely one of the many concerns the government had. Up and down the country public meetings were taking place in protest at what occurred in Manchester and demanding reform. On 21 August reformers addressed a crowd of between three and five thousand people in Glasgow and on 24 August a similar meeting was held in Leeds, at which 3,000 were in attendance. Both meetings passed off peaceably.⁴⁹⁴ On 25 August a public meeting in Smithfield, London, arranged by the Spenceans, who three years earlier had been responsible for the Spa Fields Riots, caused the authorities a great deal of concern. As a result, they took the 'necessary precautions ... for the preservation of the public peace', which included calling on the police, 500 special constables and a special force of 500 provided by the East India Company.⁴⁹⁵ 'A considerable military force' was also 'in readiness'⁴⁹⁶ should the meeting turn into a riot. It was rumoured that measures would be taken to prevent the meeting being held at all. However, despite the fears of London authorities, 'not the slightest disposition to riot was manifested' and the meeting passed with 'the strictest order'.⁴⁹⁷ On 30 August a reform meeting was held in Liverpool, also 'without any riot or disturbance'.⁴⁹⁸ By the time a meeting was called in Westminster it was clear that reformers did not intend to cause riot and revolution. As has been discussed above, some precautions were taken but not on the scale of those taken for the

⁴⁹² Estimates ranged from 15,000 to 50,000 (Ibid., 3 September 1819).

⁴⁹³ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁴ See *The Times*, 27 August 1819.

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid., 26 August 1819.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid., 2 September 1819.

Smithfield meeting, held three days before, and no where near on the scale as those of April and June 1810. The second possible reason for the government's lack of concern is a change in their perception of Burdett. In the years between 1810 and 1819 he had become a far more 'respectable' figure. This began with his refusal to participate in the procession organised to celebrate his release from the Tower on 21 June 1810,⁴⁹⁹ and continued throughout the 1810s. In 1815 violent anti-Corn Law demonstrations took place in Westminster, which Burdett criticised in the House of Commons, and he refused to attend the Spa Fields meetings, held in November and December 1816. His commitment to 'moral' rather than 'physical' force radicalism was clear. Burdett spoke against demagoguery at the Westminster meeting in 1819, claiming that 'nothing can be more wicked, or more flagitious ... than to excite an ill-will toward the constituted authorities of the state, if it be intended to turn that ill-will to the advantage of private individuals'.⁵⁰⁰ As a result, although he continued to be represented as a radical by some in this period, in March 1819, for example, Lady Shelley remarked that Burdett associated with people who had political opinions 'of the most revolutionary kind',⁵⁰¹ he was more often depicted as a champion of liberty and defender of the constitution.

IV

Sir Francis Burdett represents an important link between the liberal ideas of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century and the gradually developing democracy of his own age. He held traditional ideas that were firmly grounded in the legal and constitutional thought of the eighteenth century. The connection between his beliefs and those of the neo-Harringtonians and Country ideologues, particularly Bolingbroke, are clear. Burdett himself articulated such links, through his use of

⁴⁹⁹ Much was expected of Burdett on his release from the Tower. However, his decision to leave quietly by water rather than parade triumphantly through the streets 'grievously disappointed and offended the mighty host of friends' (Wallace, *op. cit.*, p. 132) and damaged his reputation amongst the extra-parliamentary radicals.

⁵⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰¹ Edgcumbe, R. (ed.), *The Diary of Frances, Lady Shelley 1818-1873* (2 Vols., London, 1913), Volume II, p. 35-36

historical precedent, his reverence for the ancient constitution, and his references to legal and constitutional thinkers both in his speeches in parliament and in his letters to his constituents. He coupled this with a genuine humanitarian feeling and an abhorrence of oppression in any form. Such a policy can only be described as moderate and conservative. Burdett held no republican sentiments and deeply respected all elements of the constitution. He did not want to remove or change the nature of any part of the constitution, and believed that anarchy would occur if any such thing were attempted. His objections to the government were based on the abuse and corruption that they exercised, itself a traditional idea. Burdett used legal and moderate methods to gain support for his ideas – initiating debates in the House, encouraging petitioning movements and organising gatherings of respectable gentlemen reformers. However, his no holds barred style and his forceful and inflammatory language did much to offend those in power and created the impression that he was as a dangerous radical. In 1810, for example, ‘he denied in the most offensive form he could devise the right of the House to imprison’,⁵⁰² only making the situation worse by refusing to submit to the Speaker’s Warrant and barricading himself in his house. Similarly, in 1819, it was the tone of his argument against the events at St Peter’s Fields that was radical, not the argument itself. Once again Burdett exacerbated the situation by continuing to criticise and defy the government despite awaiting trial for libel. The tone and language that Burdett used gave the impression that he was more radical than he actually was. In reality, Burdett’s views and opinions on the constitution were not ‘radical’ and were firmly grounded in traditional constitutional thought. It was Burdett’s tactics that were radical, not his ideas.

⁵⁰² Lord Holland, *Further Memoirs of the Whig Party, 1807-1821* (London, 1905), p. 49.

Chapter 1 Appendices

Appendix 1

J. Gillray, *Preparing for the Grand Attack – or – A Private Rehearsal of “the ci-devant Ministry in Danger”,* 1801



BMS 9739

Appendix 2

T. Rowlandson, *The Old Man of the Sea. Sticking to the Shoulders of Sinbad the Sailor*, 17 May 1807



THE OLD MAN OF THE SEA.
STICKING TO THE SHOULDERS OF SINBAD THE SAILOR
vid. The Arabian Nights & entertainments

BMS 10731

Appendix 3

J. Gillray, *Election Candidates: – or – The Republican Goose at the Top of the Pole – the Devil helping behind!*, 20 May 1807



Bod., John Johnson Political and Satirical Prints Collection, Political Cartoons 2 (29)

Appendix 4

C. Williams, *The First Exploit of the Modern Quixote or John Bull turned Sancho Panza*, June 1807



Bod., John Johnson Political and Satirical Prints Collection, Political Cartoons 2 (33)

Appendix 5

C. Williams, *The Head of the Poll, or the Westminster Shewman and His Puppet*, May 1807.



BMS 10733

Appendix 6

C., Williams, *British Zoology or Tower Curiosities*, April 1810



Bod., John Johnson Political and Satirical Prints Collection, Political Cartoons 2 (67)

Appendix 7

The unpublished poem below is not written in Burdett's hand. However, it is said to have been composed by Burdett in around 1797 and is contained within a batch of documents amongst which there is also a love poem written and signed by Burdett's younger brother, Charles Sedley Burdett. The Dyott family, the papers amongst which the poem is found, were from Freeford, Staffordshire, which is just twenty miles from the Burdett family home in Foremark, Derbyshire.

A Ladder near Whitehall was rear'd
Once on an April day
And thus the lower steps were hear'd
To those at the top to say
You Thieves who bid out timber waste
Faster than trees can grow
Pray why should you above be plac'd
While we are kept below?
What right has any step that's here
To Lord it o'er his Brother?
Free agents do we not appear
Just one as much as t'other?
Are tops of ladders for the few
When all alike are good?
Were we not equal cut to you
Are we not form'd of wood?
In spite of customs, laws and names
Inventions of the Devil
A Ladders constitution claims
That all be on a level
Has nature rais'd or rank'd you thus?
Or Knavish arts and tricks?
All power of Ladders flows from us
The Majesty of Sticks
The steps at top soon overpaid
This saucy declamation
And proved that Ladders can't be made
Without subordination
While so they wrangle, comes a Clown
A sly tho' silent brute
He turns the Ladder up side down
And ends the whole dispute.

Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Archive Service, Staffordshire Record Office,
D3388/85/16, Records of the Dyott Family of Freeford.

Appendix 8

Once more see the standard of liberty wave,
Rouse Britons! Your charters your country to save,
If courtiers attempt to allure you with gold,
Indignant then tell them, you scorn to be sold,
Let the knaves,
Buy their slaves;
Heaven shall hear
Freemen swear:
No bribes shall betray us,
No threats shall dismay us,
Our votes are unbought, and for Burdett are enroll'd
Ask Freedom why her Britannia looks so pale?
Because foul intrigues at elections prevail:
Then rouse from your slumber, and boldly demand
Your rights of free suffrage, unawd by command.
Produce Magna Charta, the Englishman's pride,
Behold how its mangled, transformed, and belied:
To sanction such treason should freemen incline,
Were madness, self murder, and treason combined.
For Burdett then, brave patriots, your suffrages bring,
Undaunted he'll combat fell tyranny's sling.
Unbribd by a pension, or share in a loan,
Your rights he'll maintain, though he stands up alone.
Fast wed his great spirit in libertys cause
He'll seorn to betray you for courtly applause
Nor can all the frowns of the Ministers brow
Once awe his proud heart, or compel him to bow.
Come then to the hustings and loudly proclaim
Brave Burdett for ever! yes, Burdett is the name
No jobbers, contractors, nor placemen I say - -
But Burdett and Freedom for ever, huzz!

Doncaster Archives Department, Papers of Battie-Wrightson of Cusworth,
DD/BW/P/180

Appendix 9

C. Williams, *Two Pair of Candidates Proposed to the Electors of Middlesex*, 12 July 1802



BMS 9878

Appendix 10

The M-dd-x El-c-n, Or John Bull taking a Bolus against his will, 13 August 1804



BMS 10266

Appendix 11

C. Williams, *The Triumph of Independence over Ministerial Influence and Corruption*, 8 March 1805



BMS 10732

Appendix 12

I. Cruikshank, *Tree of Corruption* - every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good is hewen down, April 1809



The Tree of CORRUPTION — every Tree therefore which bringeth not forth good (fruit) is hewen down
Cruikshank
1809

BMS 11323

Appendix 13

W. Heath, *Modern St George attacking the Monster of Despotism*, April 1810



Bod., John Johnson Political and Satirical Prints Collection, Political Cartoons 2 (68)

Appendix 14

T. Rowlandson, *The Borough-Mongers Strangled in the Tower*, April 1810



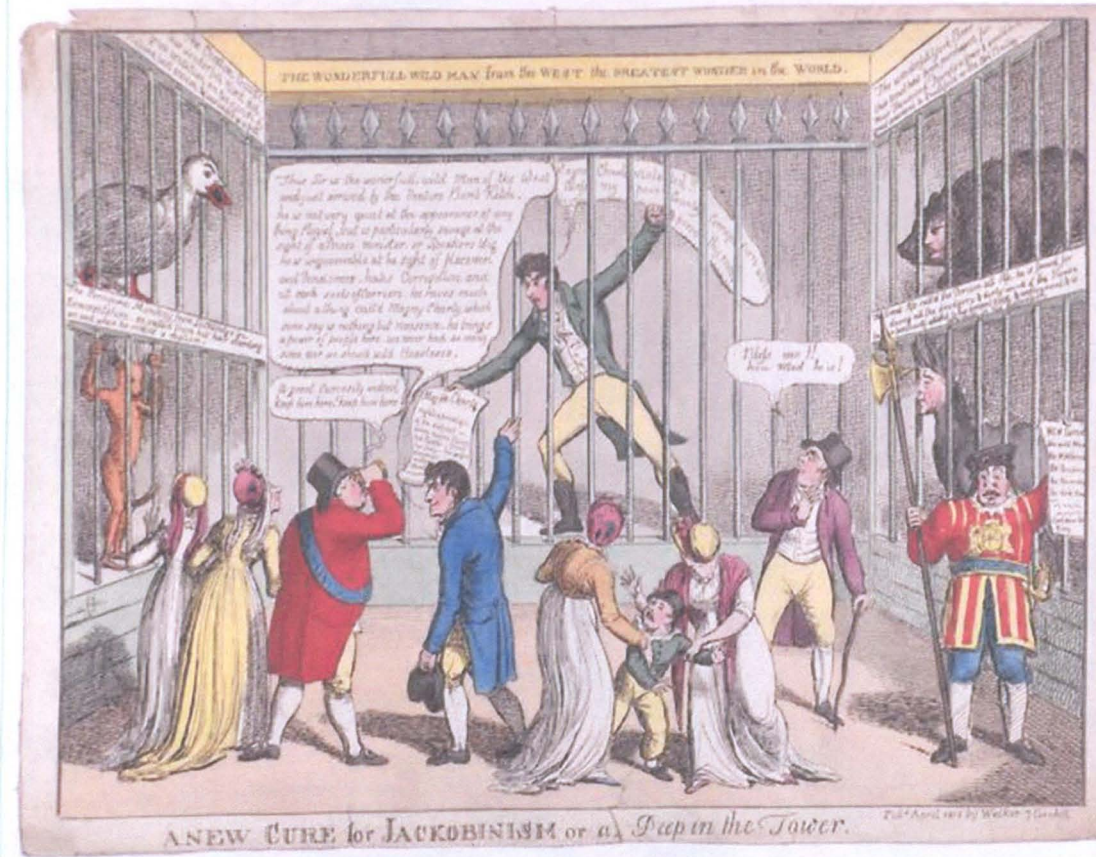
THE BOROUGH MONGERS STRANGLED IN THE TOWER.

Apr 26. 1810

BMS 11551

Appendix 15

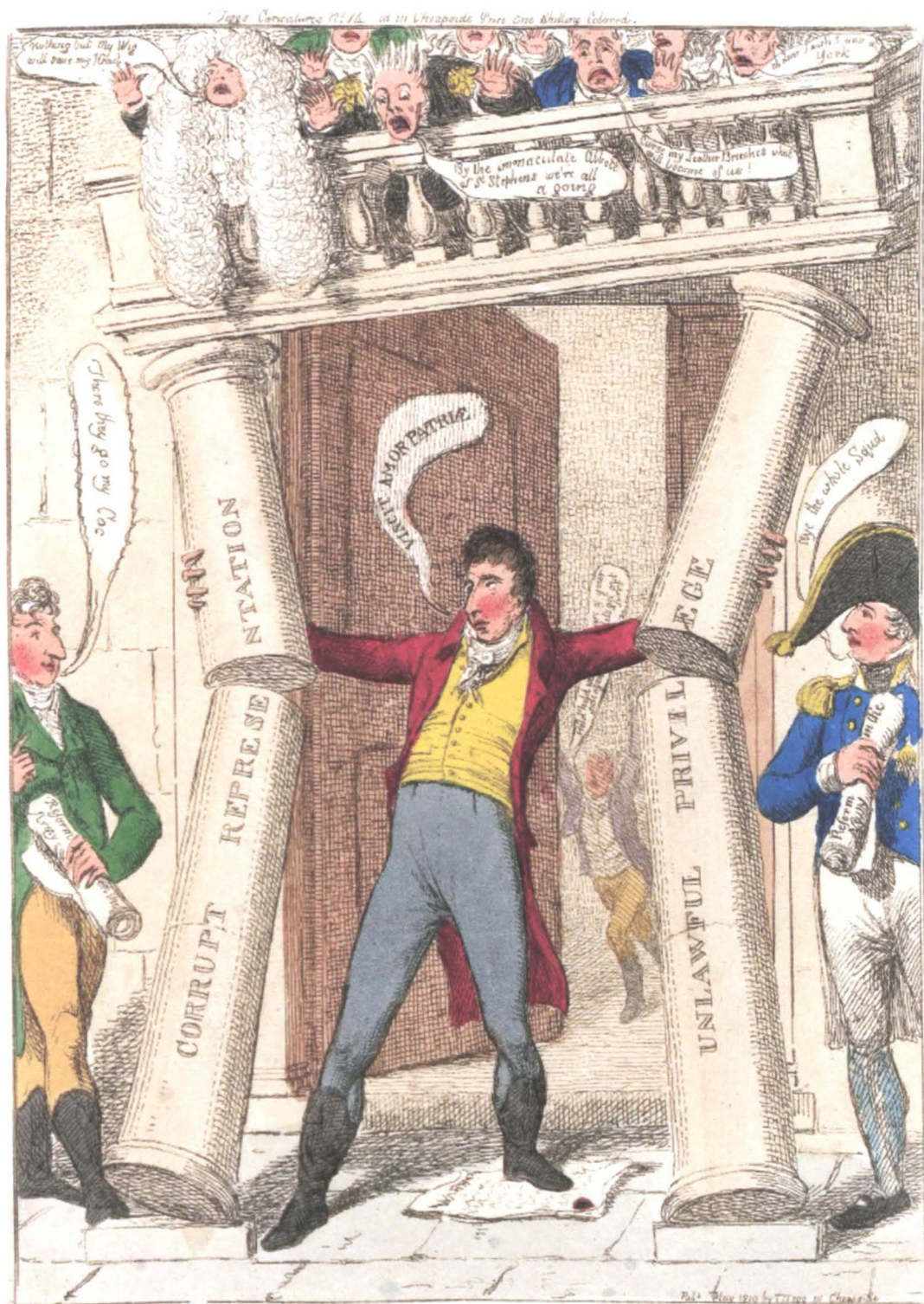
C. Williams, *A New Cure for Jackobinism or a Peep in the Tower*, April 1810



Bod., John Johnson Political and Satirical Prints Collection, Political Cartoons 2 (66)

Appendix 16

C. Williams, *The Political Sampson or Philistines in Danger*, May 1810



THE POLITICAL SAMPSON or *Philistines in Danger*

BMS 11560

Appendix 17

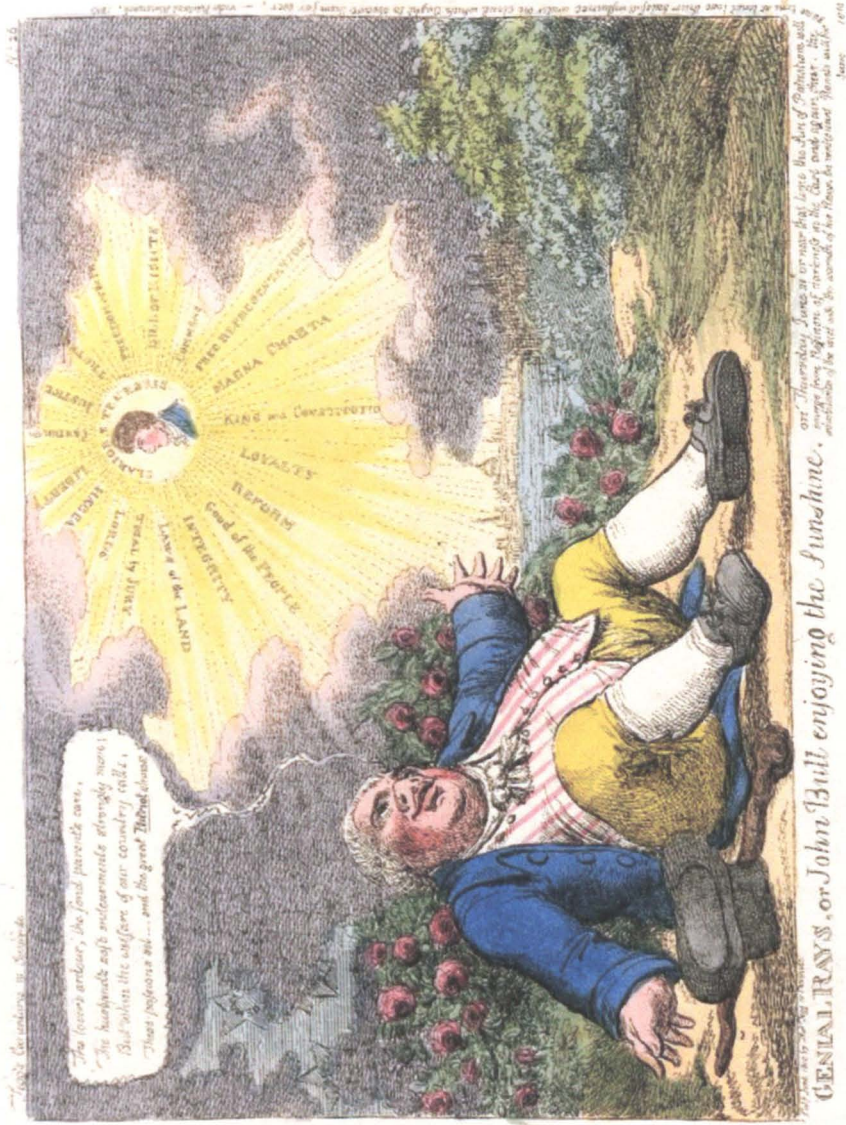
W. Heath, *A Model for Patriots or an Independent Legislator*, 10 April 1810



Bod., John Johnson Political and Satirical Prints Collection, Political Cartoons 2 (71)

Appendix 18

C. Williams, *Genial Rays, or John Bull enjoying the Sunshine*, June 1810



BMS 11563

Appendix 19

C. Williams, *Pride of Britain* (June 1810)



Here stands a Man true to his Country's Cause
 Who dares confute Despotism Laws,
 Maintain a Peoples rights and nobly proves,
 How Freedom's cause and Liberty he loves

Fearless he draws not proud Oppressions rod,
 An Honest Man's the noblest work of God.

Staunch to his trust their Charter he'll defend,
 A hailed by all a gratefull peoples Friend,
 No force can bend him to a Despot's will,
 How't he started and remains so still.

June 1810

Printed and Sold by T. Tegg in Strand

BMS 11562

Appendix 20

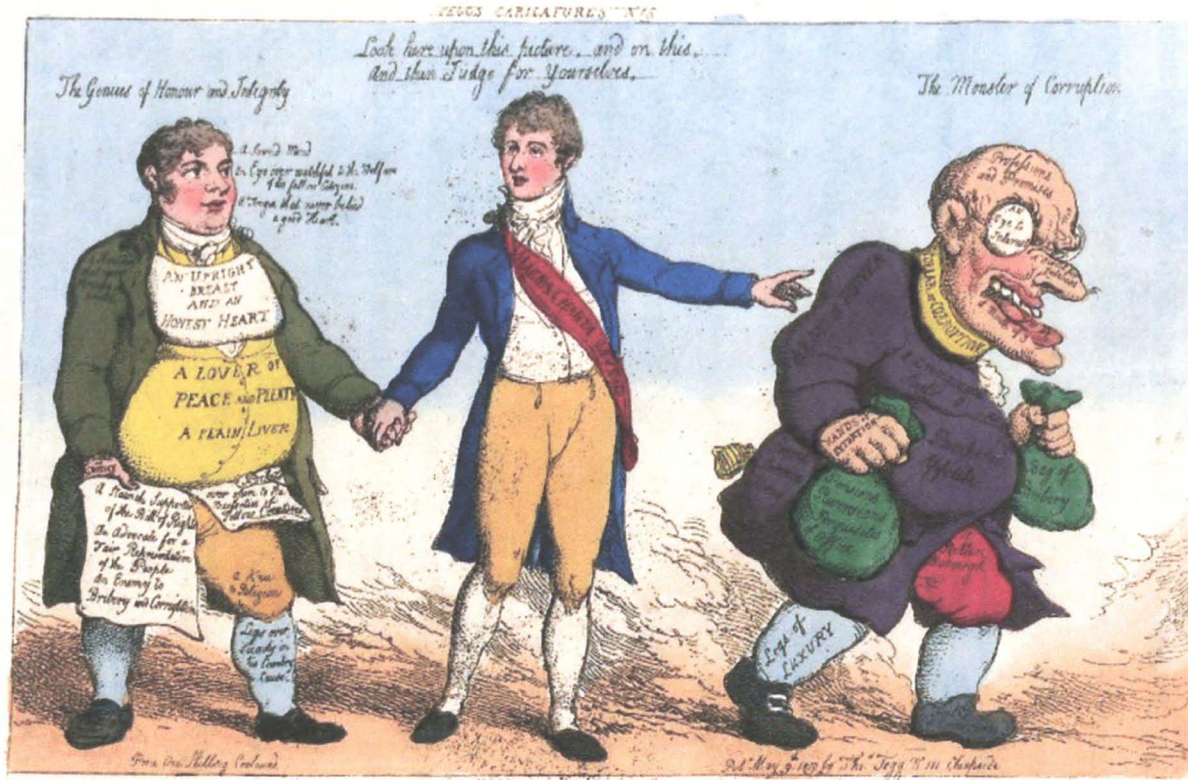
I. Cruikshank, *The Champion of Westminster, defending the people from MINISTERIAL IMPS & REPTILES*, 7 July 1818



BMS 13002

Appendix 21

T. Rowlandson, *A Rough Sketch of the Times as Deleniated by Sir Francis Burdett*, 9 May 1810 (reissued 1819)



A ROUGH SKETCH OF THE TIMES AS DELENIATED BY SIR FRANCIS BURDETT.

BMS 11553

Chapter 2

From Radical to Conservative: Burdett and Ireland

Sir Francis Burdett's involvement with Irish politics throughout his career has been the subject of surprisingly little study.¹ Although some historians have discussed in brief Burdett's friendship with Arthur O'Connor and his participation in the campaign for Catholic Emancipation,² no work to date has demonstrated the fundamental and continuing role that Ireland played in the evolution of Burdett's political ideas. Some of his first acts upon entering parliament concerned Ireland. Perhaps one reason for this neglect is Burdett's lack of any familial, financial or territorial links with Ireland. Unlike many other members of the British political elite, such as William Conyngham Plunket, George Tierney and George Canning,³ he was not in any direct, personal way related to the Anglo-Irish ascendancy and owned no Irish property. In that sense, his interest in the Irish cause was neither obvious nor predictable; his motives were disinterested. Consequently, those historians who emphasise material, careerist and patronage-related reasons for participation in politics would not be immediately attracted to this aspect of Burdett's life. Another reason may be that the sheer quantity of surviving evidence about his other campaigns has tended to crowd out the Irish dimension. As a result, the absence of a thorough understanding of Burdett's commitment to Irish issues has led to a corresponding absence of a full understanding of him as a politician. A study of Burdett and Ireland provides essential illumination of a central feature of the coherent set of libertarian beliefs that characterised his political career. In particular it reveals the full extent of the 'radical' tendencies of his early years in parliament, and helps to explain the development of a more conservative outlook in his later years.

¹ See Chapter 4 for a more in depth discussion of how Burdett's involvement with Irish affairs has been represented in historical studies on the nineteenth century.

² For Burdett's friendship with Arthur O'Connor see Patterson, *Burdett*; MacDermot, F., 'Arthur O'Connor', *Irish Historical Studies*, 15 (March 1966); Tillyard, S., *Citizen Lord: Edward Fitzgerald* (London, 1977); Hodlin, C. S., 'The Political Career of Sir Francis Burdett' (D. Phil., Oxford University, 1989); Graham, J., *The Nation, The Law and The King, Reform Politics in England, 1789-1799* (2 Vols., Maryland, 2000); Hayter-Hames, J., *Arthur O'Connor United Irishman* (Cork, 2001). For Burdett and Catholic Emancipation see Norman, E., *The English Catholic Church in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, 1984); O'Ferrall, F., *Catholic Emancipation: Daniel O'Connell and the Birth of Irish Democracy 1820-1830* (Dublin, 1985).

³ Plunket was born and educated in Ireland, Tierney's father was Irish and both of Canning's parents were Irish.

This chapter examines Burdett's long term involvement with Ireland and assesses its impact on his political ideology. The first section examines Burdett's association with Irish revolutionaries between 1796 and 1802, shows that his involvement with them was far more extensive than has been appreciated, and contends that this association ultimately helps to explain his gradual move from dealings with quasi-revolutionaries to constitutional radicalism. The second part of this chapter analyses Burdett's response to the Act of Union of 1800 and argues for the consistency of his commitment to Irish questions in British politics during the following decades. The third section argues that Burdett played a far more significant and decisive role in the leadership of the campaign for Catholic Emancipation than has been recognised in the existing historiography. His commitment to Emancipation, the sacrifices which he made to secure its passage, and the place of Emancipation in his political agenda are explored. The fourth section focuses upon Burdett's participation in Irish issues after the passage of Emancipation, the breakdown of his relationship with Daniel O'Connell, and the ways in which the politics of Ireland contributed to his growing conservatism in the later 1830s. Finally, a short concluding section draws out the significance of Ireland in the development of Burdett's career. Throughout the chapter, a central theme is that Ireland was inextricably connected to Burdett's other, better-known, political activities.

I

Irish politics during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was dominated by two closely connected issues: British dominance and the Catholic question. Ireland had long been under the control of the British government, which treated the country as a subordinate nation. Poyning's Law of 1494 transferred the powers of the Irish parliament to the hands of the English privy council, which assumed responsibility for Irish finance, defence and the appointment of Irish ministers of state. A further measure of 1692 ruled that all Irish legislation had to have the approval of the English government and in 1719 the Dependency of Ireland in Great Britain Act declared that Ireland was subordinate to Britain. In 1782 the Irish parliament was granted legislative independence but the Irish executive continued to be appointed from

England and all Irish bills were given royal assent under the Great Seal of England. The British government also maintained its influence over the Irish parliament through large numbers of placemen and pensioners. Irish Catholics, who formed a majority of the population, were denied virtually any economic or political power. The series of penal laws, which were enacted in Ireland between 1695 and 1746, were designed to protect the Protestant ascendancy from 'popery', the perceived tyranny and absolutism of Catholicism. Catholic religious orders and schools were banned, restrictions were placed on Catholic land ownership, Catholics were not allowed to vote or sit in parliament, enter the legal profession, army or navy, and were banned from practising certain trades. There was some relaxation of anti-Catholic laws from the mid-eighteenth century. In 1750, for example, Catholics were admitted to lower grades in the army and the Bogland Act of 1771 relaxed some of the laws against Catholic land ownership. Catholic Relief Acts were also passed in 1778 and 1782, the former allowing Catholics to inherit land on the same terms as Protestants and the latter removing restrictions against Catholic education and the Catholic clergy. Further measures of relief were passed in Ireland in the 1790s. In 1791 registered Catholic chapels were sanctioned and Catholics were admitted to the professions. In 1793, Hobart's Act granted the franchise to Irish Catholics who met the forty-shilling property qualification. These measures raised hopes that full Emancipation would follow. However, several restrictions remained, for example members of religious orders were barred from wearing their habits in public, the celebration of mass was prohibited in any building with a bell or steeple, and most significantly, Catholics were still barred from sitting in the Irish or British House of Commons. As a further insult, the much-hated Anglican Church of Ireland extracted tithes from Ireland's predominantly Catholic peasantry. Irish Catholics pushed for further concessions but their attempts were hindered by sectarian violence. Strong anti-Catholic feeling in England, as had been demonstrated by the Gordon Riots of 1780, was also significant in deterring the government from introducing further measures of Catholic relief.

In 1791 Theobald Wolfe Tone (1763-1798), a barrister and political writer, founded the Society of United Irishmen, a group with whom Burdett was to become closely involved between 1796 and 1798. Tone hoped to unite Catholics and Ulster

Presbyterians⁴ in a National Union to agitate for parliamentary reform, including an extension of the franchise to Catholics, repeal of the remaining penal laws, abolition of tithes and the removal of many other grievances, mainly concerning agriculture. In its early days the Society had been willing to work for reform through constitutional means. Its members were not bound to secrecy and took an oath 'To promote a union of friendship between Irishmen of every religious persuasion, and to forward a full, fair, and adequate representation of all people in parliament'.⁵ Separation from England was not one of their objectives.⁶ However, they soon realised that success through constitutional channels was unlikely. A complete break with Britain was the only way to secure for Ireland the economic rights and political power to which her inhabitants were entitled, and this could only be achieved by revolution. Tone believed that the only way an Irish rebellion would stand any chance of success was with the aid of the French. In 1796, he travelled to France to arrange a French invasion of Ireland that would coincide with an Irish rebellion, thus toppling the English and establishing an independent Irish republic. This resulted in the abortive French landing at Bantry Bay in December. After its failure, Tone fled to the continent, where he remained until his capture aboard a French vessel in 1798. He was tried for treason and sentenced to death but committed suicide before his sentence could be carried out.

The period 1796 to 1798 was therefore an extremely dangerous time to be involved with anyone connected to Irish revolutionary activity and yet Burdett, by forming a close association with United Irishman Arthur O'Connor, did just that. Arthur O'Connor (1763-1852) was born in County Cork, Ireland and educated at Trinity College, Dublin, where he was trained in law, although he never practised. In 1790 he became MP for Philipstown and a year later was appointed High Sheriff for Cork. He used his time in parliament to make known his support for Catholic Emancipation and manhood suffrage. O'Connor joined the United Irishmen in the mid-1790s and quickly became a leading member of the organisation, founding its newspaper, *The*

⁴ Protestant non-conformists also suffered political and economic discrimination in Ireland, though not to the same extent as the Catholics, and deeply resented the power of the established Church of Ireland.

⁵ *Cloncurry's Recollections*, p. 33.

⁶ Cloncurry, who joined the United Irishmen in 1795, wrote that 'no such object as separation from England was ever agitated by its members, either in public debate or private conversations' (Ibid).

Press. Burdett first met Arthur O'Connor in 1792 at the home of the Marquis of Lansdowne, William Petty Fitzmaurice,⁷ who was a close friend of Burdett's soon to be father-in-law, Thomas Coutts, and of O'Connor's uncle, Viscount Longueville. By 1795 they had formed 'one of the most intimate friendships that ever bound man and man together'.⁸ This period was a crucial time in Burdett's life. Since his marriage to Sophia Coutts, in 1793, Burdett's behaviour had caused a great deal of concern amongst his family circle. In August 1794 Thomas Coutts remarked that Burdett 'seemed to wish to walk a little bye-path of his own', 'was constantly silent' and 'reserved'.⁹ It would appear that Burdett felt he lacked direction and purpose, which evidently caused him great distress. He was finding marriage to Sophia, who was demanding of his time and attentions, difficult and in August 1795 he had contemplated emigration, separation and even suicide in order to escape his misery.¹⁰ Burdett had also suffered two family bereavements in a relatively short space of time. His younger brother Charles Sedley Burdett drowned in Switzerland in October 1793, leaving Burdett 'sincerely and deeply distressed',¹¹ and his father died in 1794. Arthur O'Connor provided Burdett with a welcome distraction from his personal unhappiness. In March 1796 O'Connor sent Burdett his election address for distribution in England and in the autumn of that year Burdett decided to visit him in Ireland. It was on this visit that Burdett met other leading United Irishmen, including Arthur O'Connor's brother Roger (1762-1834) and Lord Edward Fitzgerald (1763-1798). Burdett was keen to make a good impression, particularly on Fitzgerald, telling Arthur O'Connor, 'I hope sometime or other your friend will have more reason to think well of me'.¹²

Burdett's family chaplain, William Bagshaw Stevens, wrote extensively in his diary about the family's serious concern over Burdett's new friends, particularly his 'most uncommon attachment'¹³ to Arthur O'Connor. Sophia Burdett expressed much

⁷ Under his earlier title, the earl of Shelburne, Lansdowne had served as Prime Minister between 1782 and 1783.

⁸ O'Connor, *Memoirs*, folio 4, p. 95. Transcript extracts from this document were provided by Dr. C. D. Conner.

⁹ *Journal of Bagshaw Stevens*, p. 170.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 276.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

¹² NI, *Rebellion Papers*, 620/15/3/22, Burdett to Arthur O'Connor, 26 October 1796.

¹³ *Journal of Bagshaw Stevens*, p. 463. Thomas Coutts to Stevens, 1 June 1798.

confusion over her husband's interest in Ireland, remarking that he had 'no connection in Ireland and almost no acquaintance'.¹⁴ In September 1796, when Burdett made known his desire to go to Ireland, his brother, William Jones Burdett, wrote to Stevens telling him that Burdett had been advised against this as Sophia was in a fragile state.

He [Burdett], however, persisted in saying He must go, Necessity, not Choice called upon Him. What was his motive I know not, but he said this was so particular a Time He must go, and He accordingly went.¹⁵

Jones Burdett's choice of words here is interesting. He implies that his brother was being unduly secretive, suggesting that Burdett was involved in some kind of clandestine activity. The timing of Burdett's visit is crucial. It took place during a period of intense activity amongst the United Irishmen, just weeks before the French arrived at Bantry Bay. In his memoirs, Arthur O'Connor placed Burdett firmly at the centre of events, revealing that he and Burdett travelled together to Belfast where he 'had an immediate meeting with the Northern Executive [of the United Irishmen]' making arrangements for 'the arrival of the French'.¹⁶ Whether or not Burdett attended this meeting with O'Connor is unknown, but it is likely that he knew the details of it. According to O'Connor, he and Burdett had no secrets from one another; he remarked in his *Memoirs* that 'such was the unity of our hearts that neither had a secret for the other'¹⁷ and claimed that Burdett 'was the only Englishman to whom I had communicated my having been in France'.¹⁸ In a letter written over twenty years later, in 1819, Arthur made similar remarks, reminding Burdett that

I had never a secret to you, my heart was always as open to you as it was to myself, and you not only approved of my views and my conduct, but you always assured me they had your warmest admiration.¹⁹

The implication is clear - that Burdett, although not playing a central role in the formulation of the plans for the rebellion, was party to them and trusted not to betray them. In this respect Burdett was acting as an accessory to treason, indicating not only a genuine but a passionate interest in the affairs of Ireland and the plight of her

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 396. William Jones Burdett to Stevens, 9 October 1796.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 395.

¹⁶ O'Connor, *Memoirs*, folio 4, p. 249.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 247. Arthur O'Connor travelled to France with Lord Edward Fitzgerald in May 1796 to make arrangements for a French invasion to coincide with an Irish uprising.

¹⁹ Chateau du Bignon, France, O'Connor Papers. Arthur O'Connor to Burdett, 24 July 1819. A

people.

Letters to Arthur O'Connor, written after Burdett's return from Ireland in late October 1796, reveal how much of a hold O'Connor had over Burdett in the formative years of his political development. Burdett told O'Connor 'never was I more in want of you than at present'²⁰ and 'I really know not how to live without you'.²¹ The letters also indicate that Burdett was taking political direction from O'Connor as he promised that his maiden speech in the Commons 'will be at least as strong as your address' and wished that 'I could have the unspeakable advantage of rehearsing it before you'.²² In early 1797 Burdett asked O'Connor 'what is your new line of study - perhaps I may be able to persue the same & so we may assist one another'.²³ Burdett's ignorance of the full extent of Ireland's social problems, and his shock at witnessing their impact, is clear. In one letter he confided how he 'suffered so much from a view of so much wretchedness as I have lately been witness to'.²⁴ In another he asked O'Connor

Has [Ireland] anything more to complain of besides the oppression of the Catholicicks & the corrupt system of Government? Tell me all the particular grievances.²⁵

One is given the impression that the relationship between the two men was of a demanding master and his adoring pupil. O'Connor had Burdett running all over London distributing his election address, having his guns mended and even buying him shoes! Burdett's letters are composed with deliberate care and provide further indication of his deeper involvement in O'Connor's plots. He told O'Connor that he 'does not trust the Post',²⁶ and passed on information about people without using their names, for example, in one letter he wrote 'The Person you enquire about is now at Madrid'.²⁷

In February 1797, Burdett talked of going to Ireland again in order to support Arthur

full transcript of this letter was provided by Dr. C. D. Conner.

²⁰ NI, Rebellion Papers, 620/15/3/24, Burdett to Arthur O'Connor, 1797.

²¹ Ibid., 620/15/3/26, Burdett to Arthur O'Connor, 15 January 1797.

²² Ibid., 620/15/3/22, Burdett to Arthur O'Connor, 29 October 1797.

²³ Ibid., 620/15/3/25, Burdett to Arthur O'Connor, [early 1797].

²⁴ Ibid., 620/15/3/21, Burdett to Arthur O'Connor, 24 October 1796.

²⁵ Ibid., 620/15/3/23, Burdett to Arthur O'Connor, 19 November 1796.

²⁶ Ibid., 620/15/3/26, Burdett to Arthur O'Connor, 15 January 1797.

²⁷ Ibid., 620/15/3/25, Burdett to Arthur O'Connor, [early 1797].

O'Connor, who had been arrested at Dublin under suspicion of treasonable practices. Roger O'Connor had also been arrested on similar charges. However, he decided against such a course of action once he was assured that 'the Government Bloodhounds cannot touch My Friend'.²⁸ Instead, Burdett sent an agent to Ireland in order to ensure that O'Connor was well cared for during his incarceration. Stevens wrote, 'I wish Burdett may stand perfectly clear. I always thought it a most dangerous connexion'.²⁹ Later he wrote to Jones Burdett

I am glad He does not think of going to Ireland I hope your Brother will have Prudence enough to keep out of Serious Scrapes. His Letters to O'Connor, if O'Connor had not destroyed them, are probably in the hands of the Minister.³⁰

Stevens was correct. Letters from Burdett to Arthur O'Connor were amongst papers seized by the authorities when O'Connor was arrested. Although their content was not seditious,³¹ the letters do demonstrate the closeness of their friendship, and during this period evidence of contact with anyone suspected of treason sparked the attention of the government. Burdett, however, had abandoned all caution and made public his opinions on the government's treatment of Ireland and his friendship with the O'Connors in his maiden speech in the House of Commons in March 1797. Burdett rose to second Fox's motion for an address to the King asking that conciliatory measures be adopted to restore peace in Ireland.³² In his speech Burdett criticised government policy in Ireland and the 'evils'³³ arising from it, describing Ireland as 'a country where the fields are desolated, and the prisons overflowing with victims of

²⁸ *Journal of Bagshaw Stevens*, p. 412. Burdett to Stevens, 23 February 1797.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 410.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 414. Stevens to William Jones Burdett, 26 February 1797.

³¹ The letters seized are those discussed above, which are now contained in the Rebellion Papers at the National Archives of Ireland. MacDermot describes them as 'adoring letters' (MacDermot, 'Arthur O'Connor', p. 56).

³² Fox moved 'That a humble address be presented to His Majesty, that His Majesty will be graciously pleased to take into his royal consideration the disturbed state of his kingdom of Ireland, and to adapt such healing and lenient measures as may appear to His Majesty's wisdom best calculated to restore tranquillity and to conciliate the affections of all descriptions of His Majesty's subjects in that kingdom to His Majesty's person and Government' (*PR*, 3rd Series, Volume II, p. 121).

³³ *Ibid.* It is likely that Burdett's views on the impact of government policy on Ireland were borrowed directly from O'Connor. In 1798 O'Connor published *The State of Ireland*, in which he claimed that government economic policy, particularly that concerning trade, had destroyed any chance of industrial development in Ireland. He also suggested that high taxation, which was used to fund a corrupt administration, placed a further drain on the Irish people.

oppression'.³⁴ He talked of the 'shocking contrast' between the 'profligate, extravagant government' and the 'enslaved and impoverished People'.³⁵ Burdett openly declared himself as being connected with Arthur O'Connor 'by the strongest ties of Friendship and Affection' and protested that O'Connor was as

incapable of treason to his country ... as he is capable of everything that is great, generous, and noble, for his country's good; a man whose whole conduct delineates the exact line of rectitude and honour; whose private virtues equal, they cannot surpass, the integrity of his public conduct; who is indeed endowed with every good as well as great qualification - and of whom it may fairly be said, "*Nil non laudandum aut dixit aut sensit aut fecit*".³⁶ When such men become the objects of fear and hatred to Government, it is not difficult to ascertain the nature of their Government.³⁷

Typically for Burdett, the speech was far more inflammatory in tone and style than in content. But, by linking himself with a leading United Irishman, particularly given the situation in Ireland and the suspicion with which the government viewed the United Irish movement, Burdett was making a bold and reckless move. Burdett himself seems to have realised how controversial his speech would have been as he waited until after his grandfather's death to deliver it in order to avoid upsetting him.³⁸ Two months later, in May 1797 Burdett attended a meeting of parliamentary reformers at the Crown and Anchor Tavern in London at which toasts were made to 'the Patriots in the Bastilles of Ireland'.³⁹ Of those present at the meeting, who included Whig MPs George Tierney and Richard Brinsley Sheridan, *The Times* claimed

some were for destroying the very principles of political existence; while others, less sanguine in their professions, wished to subvert the Constitutional Government of the Country, and to fraternize with the French Republic.⁴⁰

Edmund Burke also commented on the meeting, claiming that 'the club at the Crown

³⁴ *PR*, 3rd Series, Volume II, p. 121.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ 'He never said, felt, or did anything that was not praiseworthy'.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Burdett remarked to Stevens that he was worried his 'Jacobinical Sentiments' would cause his grandfather offence (*Journal of Bagshaw Stevens*, p. 414-5).

³⁹ *The Times*, 19 May 1797.

and Anchor' was not 'one jot less treasonable than the committee at Belfast'.⁴¹

In early 1798, much of Burdett's activity revolved around Arthur O'Connor. During the debate on the Assessed Taxes Bill on 3 January 1798, he told the House of Commons that he had 'received information' from Ireland, presumably from his contacts amongst the United Irishmen, telling of great cruelty and oppression there.⁴² Burdett was present in the House of Commons to vote against the bill the next day but thereafter did not speak, is not recorded as having voted, and so was presumably absent from the House itself, until May.⁴³ On 14 January, he left his country residence at Foremark to meet 'his Friend [Arthur] O'Connor',⁴⁴ planning to return with him several days later. On 18 January he wrote to Sophia to inform her that his return would be delayed as 'His Friend was engaged in a Work and could not do without his assistance'.⁴⁵ By this time, Burdett was handing out large sums of money to O'Connor. Sophia related to Stevens her perplexity over her husband's claims of financial troubles. In his diary, Stevens remarked

Patriotism I fear is an Expensive Virtue – and He has other escapes for his Money. This I did not say to her. – Curious that at this moment he is borrowing £3000 to lend a Friend, as he calls him.⁴⁶

On 16 February 1798 Stevens heard that Burdett wanted to sell both his Leicestershire and Norfolk estates, prompting him to exclaim, 'Whence this early occasion for such defalcation of his Estate? Such urgent want of so large a Sum? It is mysterious and alarming'.⁴⁷ His comments two days later hint at what he thought Burdett's money was being spent on; 'O'Connor it seems must pay for his estreated recognizance and that of his bail £2000. He will be a *dear* Friend to Burdett'.⁴⁸ It is no coincidence that at this time Arthur O'Connor was looking for ways to secure an income for himself

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Copeland, T. W., et al, *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke* (10 Vols., London, 1958-78), Volume IX, p. 357. Edmund Burke to Mrs. John Crewe, 21 May 1797.

⁴² *PR*, 3rd Series, Volume IV, p. 541.

⁴³ Burdett is not listed as a speaker in the parliamentary records between February and April 1798, nor is his name listed amongst any recorded House divisions during this period. See *PR*, 3rd Series, Volume V.

⁴⁴ *Journal of Bagshaw Stevens*, p. 450. Stevens does not specify but it must have been Arthur O'Connor as Roger was imprisoned in Ireland at this time.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 451.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 455.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

abroad. Burdett was also involved in these arrangements. The plan was that the rents from O'Connor's Irish lands would be collected by his brother Roger and a friend, John Swiney. The proceedings would be sent to Burdett, who would forward them to Hugh Bell, a London merchant, who would then send them to O'Connor in France.

It was not only Burdett's finances that were in jeopardy; his political reputation and career were also very much at risk. As in 1796, the timing of Burdett's involvement in 1798 is crucial. The early weeks of 1798 were key in the planning of the Irish rebellion and Burdett had spent much of his time during these weeks in the company of a leading United Irishman. It was during these weeks that United Irishmen and United Britons, a group founded by United Irishmen based in London and more radical members of the London Corresponding Society (LCS) in the winter of 1797/8, were formulating plans for an Irish and English rising to coincide with a French invasion. On 28 February 1798 John Binns,⁴⁹ an Irish radical journalist and LCS member, Arthur O'Connor and James O'Coigly (also known as Quigley), a Roman Catholic priest, were arrested at Margate while attempting to travel to Paris to convey a message to the French Directory urging the French to invade Britain. On 4 March 1798 Stevens reported that the newspapers were 'full of O'Connor's capture. Pray Heaven Burdett may not be involved in any scheme of that hot-headed Irish Patriot'.⁵⁰ However, Arthur's arrest did not deter Burdett and on 5 March he twice tried to visit him in prison. The Home Secretary, the Duke of Portland, was pleased to report to the King that Burdett 'obtained no access whatever'⁵¹ to O'Connor. Meanwhile in Ireland, violence and unrest had reached a climax. In May the United Irishmen issued the formal call to rebel. However, as a result of the arrest of many of their principal leaders, including Fitzgerald, and with no aid from the French, the isolated risings which did take place were quickly crushed by government troops.

Burdett was present at the trial of those arrested at Margate, held in Maidstone on 21 and 22 May 1798. Arthur O'Connor was defended by a number of prominent, and

⁴⁹ In his autobiography Binns claimed that he first met Arthur O'Connor at Burdett's Piccadilly home in early February 1798 (Binns, J., *Recollections of the Life of John Binns: Twenty-Nine Years in Europe and Fifty-Three Years in the United States* (Philadelphia, 1854), p. 83).

⁵⁰ *Journal of Bagshaw Stevens*, p. 457.

⁵¹ Aspinall, A. (ed.) *The Later Correspondence of George III*, (5 Vols., Cambridge, 1962-70), Volume

respectable, political figures: Charles James Fox, Sheridan, Samuel Whitbread, Thomas Erskine and Lords Russell, Thanet, Oxford, Suffolk and Moira, but not Burdett. He and Binns were acquitted, while O'Coigly, on whom incriminating documents had been found, was convicted and sentenced to death. The authorities moved to re-arrest O'Connor before he could leave the court, resulting in a riot by his supporters and an attempt to escape by O'Connor.⁵² Robert Cutlar Fergusson, a lawyer with reformist sympathies, and Lord Thanet were prosecuted for their involvement in the riot and escape attempt. They were tried at the King's Bench in April 1799. Fergusson was fined £100 and imprisoned for a year; Thanet was also imprisoned for a year and fined £1000. Burdett too was close to being arrested at this time,⁵³ both for his involvement in the riot at the trial and because the government suspected him of being involved in the plots of the LCS and the United Irishmen. In March 1798 Portland was looking at evidence provided by the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland concerning the United Irish conspirators. He wrote to the King that he would consult 'your Majesty's Law servants for their opinion upon the propriety of proceeding against Sir Francis Burdett or such other persons in this country as appear to be implicated in the transactions of the United Irishmen'.⁵⁴ A month later, the government seized papers belonging to members of the LCS whom they suspected of being involved in revolutionary activity. Burdett's name is mentioned twice. In one document, dated 7 August 1797, Division 2 of the LCS names Burdett amongst a group of 'Citizens'⁵⁵ whom it wished to make honorary members. In another paper, a report of an LCS meeting chaired by Binns and held on 6 November 1797, it was resolved to adopt the

opinions & words of Sir Francis Burdett ... "that if the introduction of Uni[versa]l Suffrage leads to the annihilation of corruption and this annihilation leads to the overthrow of the monarchy we prefer to be Republicans".⁵⁶

III, p. 27. The Duke of Portland to the King, 5 March 1798.

⁵² Arthur and Roger O'Connor were both arrested and imprisoned after the failure of the rebellion.

⁵³ In his diary Stevens mentions rumours that Burdett was to be imprisoned in the Tower as early as January 1798 (*Journal of Bagshaw Stevens*, p. 452).

⁵⁴ Aspinall, *op. cit.*, Volume III, p. 32. The Duke of Portland to the King, 17 March 1798.

⁵⁵ TNA, PC1/41/138. The batch of papers in which this letter is contained is labelled 'A non-colonial series of Bundles 1798 April Corresponding Societies & Treason (Persons and Papers taken in Wych St - Examination of Col. Graham, H. Lamprey & others)'.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* At a similar meeting held by the Nottingham Corresponding Society on 31 July 1797 it

Burdett himself seemed to recognise the precarious situation in which he had placed himself by his involvement with Arthur O'Connor at this time. On 22 April 1798, Stevens reported that Burdett had sent a letter to his wife

in which he says Roger O'Connor was with him, having just been liberated from a long confinement in Ireland and then adds We must all take our turn, I believe! The Purport of this Letter seems to be to prepare her for what may happen to him. O, the curse of misguided Zeal! What wretchedness may his Rash Politics bring on himself and Friends! Better for him if the O'Connors had been hanged ten years ago.⁵⁷

In her diary, on 23 May 1799, Lady Holland remarked that had it not been for Coutts's 'secret influence with the King',⁵⁸ Burdett would have faced prosecution. Later in life Burdett himself acknowledged the risks he had taken, remarking to his son-in-law, Robert Otway-Cave, in 1834 that had he been born in Ireland 'I should have finished as so many of its sons do on the gallows'.⁵⁹ In parliament in December 1837 Burdett referred to the 'folly of his youth' when his 'blood was warmer'.⁶⁰

The danger of the circles in which Burdett was mixing and how close he came to arrest can be assessed by comparing his case with that of Valentine Browne Lawless (1773-1853), later Lord Cloncurry. Lawless joined the United Irishmen in 1795 and was arrested and imprisoned twice, the first time in 1798 for six weeks, and the second time in April 1799, when he was held until the suspension of Habeas Corpus expired in March 1801. He claimed that the reason for his arrest was his 'casual act of charity'⁶¹ towards O'Coigly, who approached him in London in February 1798 asking for money. Lawless aided the priest as much as he could and also invited him to dinner with himself and Arthur O'Connor. It was shortly after this event that O'Connor, O'Coigly and Binns were arrested at Margate. The extent of Lawless's involvement is strikingly similar to Burdett's. Lawless had given money to one of the

was resolved 'That Sir Francis Burdett and others, for their manly and patriotic zeal in defence of the people's just rights, demand our admiration and applause' (Davis, M. T. (ed.), *London Corresponding Society, 1792-1799* (London, 2002), p. 268).

⁵⁷ *Journal of Bagshaw Stevens*, p. 460.

⁵⁸ Ilchester, Earl of (ed.), *The Journal of Elizabeth Lady Holland 1791-1811* (2 Vols., London, 1908), Volume I, p. 251.

⁵⁹ Bod., Burdett-Coutts Papers, MSS 39455, folio 95. Burdett to Robert Otway-Cave, 6 June 1834.

⁶⁰ *PD*, 3rd Series, Volume XXXIX, p. 789.

⁶¹ *Cloncurry's Recollections*, p. 67.

men arrested at Margate, so had Burdett; Lawless had socialised with O'Coigly and O'Connor; Burdett was a close friend of O'Connor and had provided him with a place to stay in the week before his arrest at Margate. There are, however, crucial differences between the two men, which condemned Lawless but saved Burdett from arrest. At the time Lawless was the untitled son of an Irish peer and was living in London on a small allowance. Also, he was a member of the United Irishmen and had taken the United Irish oath upon joining the movement. Burdett on the other hand was not only titled and immensely wealthy, he was a serving MP. Most importantly he was English and had never joined the United Irishmen, or taken the United Irish oath.

Burdett's behaviour in May and June 1798 is a curious mix of caution and recklessness. He remained loyal to the O'Connors, but he also tried to divert attention from his own involvement in their plots. On 25 May Burdett wrote to William Wickham, under-secretary at the Home Office, requesting permission to see Roger O'Connor in prison, describing himself as 'the only Man He can call His Friend'.⁶² On the same day Arthur O'Connor wrote to Portland to ask that Burdett be allowed to see him.⁶³ The next day Burdett wrote to Portland with his account of the Maidstone trial. In the letter he did not discuss Arthur O'Connor at all, save to mention him amongst the accused at the very beginning. However, he did condemn O'Coigly, stating 'there is no circumstance which I can state to your Grace affording the smallest mitigation of his offence'.⁶⁴ The purpose of the letter is unclear, although the impression given is that Burdett was required by the Home Office to give an account as part of the investigation into the riot that occurred.⁶⁵ If this was the case, Burdett's failure to mention O'Connor was probably a deliberate tactic employed to avoid prosecution. However, in the Commons on 11 June Burdett defended the O'Connors, hinting that he believed Roger, in particular, was being victimised by the Government

Another curious argument had been brought forward, respecting the possibility of Mr. Roger O'Connor having committed acts of treason in Ireland, on account of which he might be sent back to that country. Yet

⁶² TNA, PC1/42/143. Burdett to William Wickham, 25 May 1798.

⁶³ Ibid. Arthur O'Connor to the Duke of Portland, 25 May 1798.

⁶⁴ Ibid. Burdett to the Duke of Portland, 26 May 1798.

⁶⁵ Written on the back of the letter in pencil, in a different hand from Burdett's is: 'H.M. will take this report & the adjoined Report of the Recorder into consideration Wednesday next which the Great

these treasons were such that the Government of Ireland had entirely forgotten them.⁶⁶

The government's reluctance to produce in the House the warrants for the O'Connors' arrests 'was to him proof that they were conscious of having acted wrong'.⁶⁷ Also in June 1798, in a final act of recklessness, Burdett joined the LCS, a group viewed by the government with extreme suspicion. Such behaviour was typical of the young Burdett. He was impetuous and rash; rushing into things without properly considering the consequences and speaking without thinking, which led him into trouble.⁶⁸ In his diary, Stevens gives an example of the young Burdett's impulsiveness. In January 1795 Burdett and Thomas Coutts had a disagreement over Stevens's romantic interest in one of Coutts's daughters, Fanny. Burdett had received a letter from his father-in-law, the content of which offended him. He hastily drafted a reply which was 'of so caustic a nature that no reconciliation could possibly have been grafted upon it'.⁶⁹ Stevens convinced Burdett to 'new mould his answer' but even the revised version 'was too strong. I told him a dignified moderation would be more felt than the Severest Expressions He could use'.⁷⁰ Burdett followed Stevens advice and changed the contents of the letter. It was well received by Coutts who was impressed by Burdett's 'unexpected moderation'.⁷¹ The two men were quickly reconciled.

By mid-1798 Stevens reported that Burdett was 'worn out with anxiety for his unfortunate or rather imprudent friends'⁷² and his behaviour thereafter suggests a desire to distance himself completely from the rebellion and limit the political damage caused by his association with those involved. During the second half of 1798 Burdett attended the House of Commons regularly, although he did not mention the O'Connors in his speeches, and spent much of his time with his family, relations between him and his wife having significantly improved by this point. Coutts, who, throughout this period, was keen to rein in his wayward son-in-law, no doubt

Cabinet & the Recorder to attend accordingly'. Ibid.

⁶⁶ *PR*, 3rd Series, Volume IV, p. 375-6.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 376.

⁶⁸ For further analysis of Burdett's rash behaviour in the early part of his career see Chapter 1, Section III.

⁶⁹ *Journal of Bagshaw Stevens*, p. 345.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 346.

⁷² Ibid., p. 463.

encouraged this prudent measure.⁷³ His experiences with the O'Connors and the resulting brush with the law had taught Burdett a valuable lesson. It refocused his energies away from the dangers of Irish radicalism and towards constitutional change through parliamentary channels. However, Burdett's retreat was strategic, not ideological. He retained his interest in Irish politics but pursued it in different ways, realising that extreme radical tactics actually damaged the prospect of achieving one's goal as it alienated potential supporters and aroused government suspicion.

Burdett's intense relationship with Arthur O'Connor did not continue. When Arthur was released from prison in 1802 Burdett sent him a letter 'filled with the warmest professions of affection, esteem and friendship',⁷⁴ but it was to be the last letter O'Connor would receive from Burdett until 1819. The breakdown of their friendship was caused by a bitter dispute between the O'Connor brothers over Roger's mismanagement of Arthur's estates, in which Burdett took Roger's side. Hayter-Hames suggests that this was because Burdett 'felt sorry for Roger and his family' and had become 'disillusioned'⁷⁵ with Arthur. MacDermot also claims that Burdett pitied Roger, regarding him as 'an innocent victim of persecution'.⁷⁶ However, Burdett favouring Roger was simply a result of circumstance. Roger remained in England after his release from prison in 1801 and was thus able to give Burdett a full account of his side of the story. Arthur, meanwhile, had fled to France and remained exiled there for the rest of his life, unable to present to Burdett his view. Given the estrangement between Arthur and Burdett, and Roger's close proximity, it is hardly surprising that Burdett took Roger's side. Indeed, his friendship with Roger O'Connor continued for many years. Roger named one of his sons Francis Burdett O'Connor in his friend's honour, and asked Burdett to be the child's godfather. Roger was also present at Burdett's house in 1810 when he was arrested for breach of parliamentary privilege and in 1817 Burdett travelled to Ireland to give evidence on behalf of Roger, who was on trial for his involvement in the Galway mail robbery of

⁷³ On 30 July 1798 Stevens reported that Coutts had written to him stating that he hoped Burdett would 'find comfort in contributing to the happiness of the Circle at Foremark' (*Journal of Bagshaw Stevens*, p. 468).

⁷⁴ Chateau du Bignon, France, O'Connor Papers. Arthur O'Connor to Burdett, 24 July 1819.

⁷⁵ Hayter-Hames, J., *Arthur O'Connor: United Irishman* (Cork, 2001), p. 252.

⁷⁶ MacDermot, 'Arthur O'Connor', p. 66.

1812.⁷⁷ Burdett also continued to be involved in Irish radical activity, becoming involved in the case of the Irish revolutionary Colonel Despard, albeit as a part of his campaign for an improvement in prison conditions.⁷⁸

Colonel Edward Marcus Despard (1751-1803) was from an Irish landowning family. A military engineer based in the West Indies, he had worked closely with Nelson during the expedition to capture Fort San Juan from the Spanish in 1779. In 1784 Despard was rewarded for his service with the Governorship of British Honduras. However, he was recalled without explanation in 1790 and two years later told by the Foreign Secretary, Lord Grenville, that his post was abolished. Despard was offered no further employment and no compensation. Deeply aggrieved by his treatment, and already committed to Irish independence, Despard joined the LCS and became involved with the United Britons. He was arrested on suspicion of treasonable practices in March 1798 during the wave of arrests following those at Margate, and confined to Coldbath Fields Prison for ten days but released without charge. A month later Despard was arrested again and detained at Coldbath Fields indefinitely. In December 1798, John Courtenay, Foxite MP for Appleby, raised Despard's plight in the House during the debates on Pitt's proposal to extend the period of Habeas Corpus suspension. Courtenay read out a letter from Despard's wife, Catharine, in which she complained of the terrible conditions in which her husband was confined. Burdett, who knew of Despard through the LCS, rose to speak but used the occasion for a wider discussion of prison conditions and did not mention Despard. However, several days later, after visiting the prison and seeing for himself the conditions in which Despard was being kept, Burdett openly supported him, stating that what he had witnessed had 'proved to him the truth of every tittle contained in [Mrs. Despard's] Letter'.⁷⁹

After the arrests of March and April 1798, the United Britons had changed their name to the United Englishmen and reorganised their structure in order to prevent

⁷⁷ Read and Glasgow maintain that O'Connor claimed he orchestrated the robbery in order to rescue some love letters written by Burdett to Lady Oxford, which, had they fallen into the wrong hands, would have been highly damaging to Burdett's reputation (See Read, D., and Glasgow, E., *Feargus O'Connor: Irishman and Chartist* (London, 1961), p. 13).

⁷⁸ See Chapter 1, Section II.

infiltration from spies. They formed a public committee which organised legal activities, such as fundraising for state prisoners and their families. Amongst the contributors were Whig peers, Foxite MPs and, of course, Burdett. A secret private committee was also established in order to continue the group's more subversive activities. When Despard was released from prison in April 1801 Burdett acted as surety for his good behaviour. In the following months, Despard took a step back from radicalism and returned to his family's land in Ireland. However, he then returned to London and took up a leading role in a plot to overthrow the government.⁸⁰ On 16 November 1802 Despard and several others were arrested at the Oakley Arms tavern in Lambeth on suspicion of high treason. Burdett was the first to leap to Despard's defence and with the help of Horne Tooke formed a committee to raise funds for Despard, himself contributing a hundred pounds. At Despard's trial Lord Nelson spoke in his defence, stating that no man was more devoted to his King and Country. It did nothing to sway the jury in favour of the accused and, in February 1803 Despard was found guilty of High Treason and sentenced to death. Burdett remained a close friend of Despard until his execution and thereafter supported Catharine Despard with a pension. Burdett also defended Despard's hereditary right to be interred in St Faith's Churchyard, which was within the walls of St Paul's Cathedral.

Burdett's involvement with the Despard case further damaged his reputation and fuelled rumours of his radical, even revolutionary, nature. The government believed that Burdett knew about the plot but had refused to become directly involved. They were also convinced that Burdett knew of the Oakley Arms meeting in advance; he did after all know many of those present from his Coldbath Fields campaign. Despard's nieces, Elizabeth and Jane Despard, who believed their uncle to be an innocent victim of government persecution, both claim in their memoirs that Burdett had a significant influence over Despard. Jane Despard wrote that Burdett was 'foremost amongst [Despard's] professing friends'.⁸¹ Elizabeth Despard claimed that

⁷⁹ *PR*, 3rd Series, Volume VII, p. 466.

⁸⁰ In 'The "Despard Conspiracy" Reconsidered' (*P&P* 75, May 1977) Elliott challenges the idea that Despard was the overall leader of the plot, claiming that prosecution witnesses exaggerated his role.

⁸¹ Despard, J., *Memoranda Connected with the Despard Family from recollection of Miss Jane Despard of Cheltenham*, 1838 (unpublished memoir), p. 54. Access to this document was provided by

the government tried to bribe Despard into betraying others involved in the plot and commented that the general belief was that ‘Sir Francis Burdett was the man aimed at’.⁸² Despard, however, refused to be bought. Elizabeth remarked that had Burdett ‘been brought to trial ... his reforming principles might have been found quite as worthy [of] condemnation, practical and theoretical, as those of his friend [Despard] of whom he made a tool’.⁸³ Whether true or not, such rumours reflected badly upon Burdett and had more evidence of his involvement been discovered he could have found himself in the dock. The Despard case, regardless of the extent of Burdett’s involvement in the conspiracy, or whether or not he truly believed Despard to be innocent, is significant as it serves as one of the first examples of Burdett defending the rights and liberties of the individual against what he regarded as the tyranny of the government. Moreover, the Despard affair gave Burdett the first opportunity to put into practice his new tactics, which focused on enacting change constitutionally through parliament. The transformation did not go unnoticed. In 1804 William Windham remarked that ‘It is impossible not to perceive a most marked change in his conduct now, as compared with what it was at the former election [in 1802]’.⁸⁴

Burdett’s foray into the revolutionary arena between 1796 and 1802 was a formative experience, the ramifications of which were to stay with him for many years. Prints of the period portrayed Burdett as a dangerous republican, in league with traitors and with the French. For example, Gillray’s *French Habits No. 12, Messenger d’Etat* (21 May 1798) shows Burdett, dressed in the attire of a French Revolutionary delivering documents to an unseen recipient.⁸⁵ Another Gillray print, *Citizens visiting the Bastille* (16 January 1799) shows Burdett attempting to gain access to Coldbath Fields Prison. From his pocket hangs a piece of paper labelled ‘Secret Correspondence with O’Conner Evans Quigley Despard’.⁸⁶ An unpublished Gillray print, entitled *Icarus*

Mr. Herbert Despard.

⁸² Despard, E., *Recollections of the Despard Family*, c.1850 (unpublished memoir), p. 12. Access to this document was provided by Mr. Herbert Despard.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁸⁴ Earl of Rosebery (ed.), *The Windham Papers: The Life and Correspondence of the Rt. Hon. William Windham 1750-1810, a Member of Pitt’s First Cabinet and the Ministry of “All the Talents” including hitherto unpublished letters from George III, the Dukes of York and Gloucester, Pitt, Fox, Burke, Canning, Lords Grenville, Minto, Castlereagh and Nelson, Malone, Cobbett, Dr. Johnson, Dr. Burney etc* (2 Vols., London, 1908), Volume II, p. 235.

⁸⁵ BMS 9213. See Appendix 1.

⁸⁶ BMS 9341. See Appendix 2.

(c.1800),⁸⁷ which was probably intended for the deluxe edition of the *Anti-Jacobin Magazine and Review* Gillray was hoping to produce in 1800, shows a winged Burdett flying towards a Helios/Apollo-type figure, who wears a liberty cap and is blowing tri-coloured bubbles. Burdett, who is weighed down by a cannon tied to his right leg, upon which is the face of Napoleon, scatters bits of tri-coloured paper, which are collected by savage figures below, all of whom are wearing liberty caps. The ghost of Burke is also shown at the side of the print. The message is clear. Burdett aspires to the freedom promised by the French Revolution but has been deceived. The figure in the sky is not the god of sunlight and prophecy, but a demonic figure whose bubbles of light and truth are an illusion that will soon burst. His chariot is pulled by asses, not winged horses, and his liberty cap has a series of bells on it, like the hat of a jester or clown. In March 1798 the *Morning Herald* criticised Burdett for the

impropriety at least, to call it by no other name, of Sir F. BURDETT, a Member of the British Parliament, volunteering himself as Bondsman for men charged with facts of so much treasonable appearance against the welfare of his own country!⁸⁸

Burdett continued to be condemned for his connection with revolutionaries over the following years. At the Middlesex Election in July 1804 Burdett's opponents attempted to discredit him in a public letter by naming his associates and their various crimes, including Arthur O'Connor and Despard, calling these men 'the framers of his political creed'.⁸⁹ In a public letter to the Middlesex freeholders, printed shortly after the 1804 election, Burdett was condemned for being 'intimately connected'⁹⁰ with Despard and it was alleged that the day before Despard's arrest Burdett was seen 'walking with him, arm in arm'.⁹¹ The author, who remained anonymous, insinuated that Burdett was party to Despard's schemes, declaring 'concealment from the

⁸⁷ Godfrey, R., *James Gillray: The Art of Caricature* (London, 2001), p. 104. The title given for this print is merely speculative.

⁸⁸ *Morning Herald*, 6 March 1798.

⁸⁹ *Middlesex Election 1804*, p. 10. This letter also appeared in *The Times* on 20 July 1804.

⁹⁰ *A Letter to the Freeholders of Middlesex; containing an examination of the objections made to the return at the close of the late Middlesex election; and remarks on the political character and conduct of Sir Francis Burdett, Bart. by an attentive observer* (London, 1804), p. 78.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

intimacy of friendship is an absurdity'.⁹²

While intimacy existed between them [Burdett and Despard], Colonel Despard was apprehended in the act of corrupting the soldiery, and of inciting them - horrible to relate - to the murder of their Sovereign!⁹³

Burdett was also implicated in Arthur O'Connor's treasonable activities. The author of the letter claimed that shortly before O'Connor's arrest Burdett purchased the lease on a house in Elstree for O'Connor's use. Also, 'a chaise of a particular construction, containing private pockets for the purpose of secreting papers'⁹⁴ was said to have been ordered by Burdett for O'Connor. Burdett's refusal to deny the charges against him and his failure to distance himself from, and justify his contact with, those suspected of sedition and treason is treated by the author as an admission of guilt. In 1810, Burdett was still being labelled in *The Courier* as 'the friend of Despard, and the associate of Roger O'Connor'.⁹⁵ Also in a public letter addressed to Burdett by one of his Westminster constituents in 1811,⁹⁶ Burdett was criticised for associating with traitors like the O'Connors and Despard. The author mentioned rumours that Burdett had funded the meetings at the Oakley Arms and also claimed that Burdett's name was uttered by Despard on the gallows. At a libel trial held at the Court of the King's Bench in January 1811, the defendant, Jacks, faced prosecution for remarking 'What opinion can be formed of Sir F. Burdett who had associated with convicted traitors, such as Despard, Lemaitre,⁹⁷ and O'Connor'⁹⁸ at a debate of the Common Council of the City of London in June 1810. Prints of the 1800s and 1810s continued to show Burdett as a dangerous radical, often surrounded by French revolutionary images, for example, in de Wilde's *The Reformers Dinner* (1 June 1809) and Gillray's *True Reform of Parliament, i.e. Patriots lighting a Revolutionary Bonfire in New Palace Yard* (14 June 1809) Burdett is shown waving a bonnet

⁹² Ibid., p. 81.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 79.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 93.

⁹⁵ Erdman, D. V. (ed.), *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge 3: Essays on His Times in The Morning Post and The Courier* (3 Vols., London, 1978), Volume III, p. 110.

⁹⁶ *Adultery and Patriotism. A Short Letter to Sir Francis Burdett, Bart. M.P. With a Long Postscript by an Elector of Westminster, and one of his Constituents* (London, 1811).

⁹⁷ Peter Lemaitre, a watch-case maker, was a member of the General Committee of the LCS and had been arrested for high treason in 1794 for his suspected involvement in the 'Pop-Gun Plot', which was a plan to assassinate George III with a poisoned arrow. He brought the suit against Jacks for the comment.

⁹⁸ *The Times*, 17 January 1811.

rouge.⁹⁹ George Cruikshank's *Radical Quacks giving a New Constitution to John Bull* (4 February 1821) is also littered with imagery indicating Burdett was in league with French revolutionaries.¹⁰⁰ In reality, however, the end of the Despard affair marked the end of an important and arguably 'radical' phase of Burdett's career. He had started out in 1796 as a hot-headed, almost revolutionary, individual and emerged in 1802 as a constitutional radical, keen to work for change through parliamentary channels.

II

The rebellion and its aftermath made it clear that a new constitutional settlement was needed in order to avoid further terror and bloodshed in Ireland. Plans for a constitutional union between Britain and Ireland were accepted by the British parliament in January 1799 but rejected by the Irish parliament. However, by March 1800 both the Irish and the British parliaments had consented to the Union, and the bill was given royal assent on 1 August 1800. Under its terms Ireland would send thirty-two peers to the Lords and a hundred MPs to the Commons. Irish peers who did not sit in the Lords were allowed to stand for election to the Commons. The established Churches of England and Ireland were also united. Catholics were not considered in the Union settlement. They continued to be denied political rights and tithes remained. Burdett opposed the Act of Union.¹⁰¹ In January 1799 in a letter to Earl Stanhope, a former LCS member with suspected links to United Irishmen, he described it as 'an insult'.¹⁰² Burdett feared that the influx of Irish MPs to Westminster would have a damaging effect on the British parliament. Irish members had already showed their capacity for corruption by accepting bribes to vote their own parliament out of existence.¹⁰³ He claimed that 'one more infusion (the Scotch

⁹⁹ See Chapter 3, Appendices 2 and 3.

¹⁰⁰ See Chapter 3, Appendix 6.

¹⁰¹ In April 1799 Burdett declared 'he should undoubtedly give it [the proposed Union] his opposition' (PR, 3rd Series, Volume VIII, p. 514).

¹⁰² Bod., Burdett-Coutts Papers, MSS 39455, folio 78. Burdett to Earl Stanhope, 24 January 1799.

¹⁰³ The bribery and corruption used to secure the passage of the Union has been played down by many historians. Norman, for example, believes that claims 'have been exaggerated' (Norman, E., *A History of Modern Ireland* (London, 1971), p. 38). However, the work of Wilkinson has established that over £30,000 of Home Office Secret Service money was issued for use in Ireland between October 1799 and May 1800, a crucial period in the Union debates (Wilkinson, D., "'How Did They Pass The Union?': Secret Service Expenditure in Ireland, 1799-1804", *History*, 82 (1997), p. 231). Wilkinson claims that

Representation I call one)¹⁰⁴ of poison' would 'completely destroy our languishing & debilitated constitution' and increase 'the means of corruption'.¹⁰⁵ Burdett did not object entirely to the concept of a union between Britain and Ireland, only the form of Union proposed by the government. In March 1797, for example, he had described the 'interests of Ireland and this country' as being 'the same' but claimed that 'Both should be free'.¹⁰⁶ Burdett clearly wanted there to be a constitutional connection between the two countries but did not wish for Ireland to be under Britain's control. He certainly objected 'to an Union brought about by a mere hollow vote of a corrupt Parliament, seconded by military power',¹⁰⁷ as he believed it would 'irritate and inflame'¹⁰⁸ the people of Ireland. Burdett favoured 'an Union accomplished by a conviction in the minds of the Irish people of its advantages' believing that such a measure would 'conciliate the people, restore peace and liberty, and justice to Ireland'.¹⁰⁹ Burdett feared the impact that the Union would have upon both Britain and Ireland, remarking that the 'two countries, even in spite of themselves, [would] be forced mutually to oppress one another'.¹¹⁰

Burdett continued to oppose the Union whenever he spoke on Irish matters for years after its passage, believing that without any measure of Catholic relief, it had done nothing to solve the troubles in Ireland. In November 1802 he described it as a 'Subjugation' which had conferred 'no benefit'.¹¹¹ In June 1809 he claimed it was 'a measure contrary to the wishes, repugnant to the interest, revolting to the feelings of that nation'.¹¹² In March 1818 he called it 'a foul act which outraged every feeling of public honour and good faith'¹¹³ and had forced Ireland into financial ruin.

this money was used to pay supporters of the Union, fund government propaganda, and buy seats in the Irish House of Commons. He points out that around the time of the Union there were 18 creations and 15 promotions in the Irish peerage (Ibid., p. 242). Moreover, between January 1799 and May 1800 a staggering 88 by-elections took place in Ireland, 'remarkable in a house of only 300 members' (Ibid., p. 247).

¹⁰⁴ Burdett is referring to the Act of Union with Scotland in 1707, whereby the parliaments of Scotland and England were united.

¹⁰⁵ Bod., 39455, Burdett-Coutts Papers, folio 78. Burdett to Earl Stanhope, 24 January 1799.

¹⁰⁶ PR, 3rd Series, Volume VI, p. 375.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., Volume VIII, p. 513. These comments were made during the Union debates in April 1799.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 514.

¹¹¹ PR, 4th Series, Volume I, p. 132.

¹¹² CPD, Volume XIV, London, 1809, p. 1050.

¹¹³ PD, Volume XXXVIII, p. 644.

In June 1825 Burdett condemned the Act of Union as

the produce of the most shameful, scandalous, indeed, shameless corruption, that had ever disgraced the annals of a nation. One parliament sold its country - another parliament became the purchaser - and the sale was made good by the assistance of military power.¹¹⁴

Burdett remained fiercely critical of government policy in Ireland. He believed that government repression had caused the 1798 rebellion and was responsible for the continuing violence and unrest. In April 1801 he claimed that 'the dreadful, horrible Acts of the Irish Parliament' and 'the wicked policy of the Ministers of England' had brought about a 'change of sentiment'¹¹⁵ in the Irish people and encouraged disaffection. In April 1802 Burdett actually charged the government with instigating the rebellion in order to push through the Union. He claimed that the 'United Irishmen were formed [in 1791], and every thing wore an aspect favourable to peace, mutual affection, and reform'¹¹⁶ and accused the government of encouraging disunion between Catholics and Protestants in order 'to hold Ireland in a state of abject slavery'.¹¹⁷ It was the object of government policy 'to drive the people into premature insurrection'.¹¹⁸ Burdett often criticised the government for alienating the Irish people who, he maintained, had always been loyal to Britain.¹¹⁹ In parliament in January 1812 he criticised the government for defending the rights of Catholics abroad while ignoring the rights of those closest to home

We were fighting strenuously to maintain the Catholic religion in the country of our Spanish allies; though, at the same time, those whom he should conceive to be our more valuable allies at home - the Irish - a generous, brave, and long-suffering people, were, for a trifling condition, withheld from their best and dearest rights. This exclusion of our most natural allies, he could not but consider as an act of gross treachery.¹²⁰

¹¹⁴ *PD*, New Series, Volume XIII, p. 1159.

¹¹⁵ *PR*, 3rd Series, Volume XV, p. 64.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Volume XVIII, p. 14.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹¹⁹ In April 1801 Burdett reminded the House of the loyalty of the Irish people during the American war and the early stages of the war with France.

¹²⁰ *CPD*, Volume XXI, p. 20. Burdett used similar arguments in 1827 when he criticised the House for pledging to uphold the rights of the Braganza dynasty in Portugal, asking 'was not

Burdett retained a genuine affection for and interest in Ireland throughout the 1800s and 1810s,¹²¹ believing that 'he must continue to raise his voice in defence of the oppressed, ill-treated, and gallant people'.¹²² He regarded Ireland as 'a subject of too much importance to be casually dismissed' and claimed that it 'demanded our [parliament's] whole undivided attention'.¹²³ In 1809, while presenting his motion for parliamentary reform, Burdett described to the House how passionately he felt about the Irish cause. He talked of the 'deep interest' he had in 'the concerns of that country' and 'its mighty importance' which 'has never been out of my mind'.¹²⁴

It is a subject I cannot discuss without a more considerable degree of warmth, than is consistent with the dispassionate line of conduct I am on this occasion particularly anxious to maintain.¹²⁵

In the autumn of 1817 Burdett visited Ireland for the second time and spent several weeks there. Although principally there to act as a character witness for Roger O'Connor, who was standing trial for his involvement in the Galway mail robbery of 1812, the trip was also one of pleasure. He travelled all over the southern part of Ireland sightseeing and meeting its people. Burdett was well received. After O'Connor was acquitted, Burdett and O'Connor were both chaired through the town of Trim, County Meath, 'and the cheering of Sir Francis Burdett, by name, was loud and general'.¹²⁶ In his letters to his wife Sophia, Burdett spoke of the Irish people in glowing terms. In one letter he remarked that the people of Ireland were 'a fine race even poverty does not extinguish their souls',¹²⁷ while in another he declared 'the people of Ireland I love. If they are savages they are the greatest savages ever seen'.¹²⁸

an alliance with the people of Ireland of infinitely more importance to us than an alliance with the people of Portugal?' (*PD*, New Series, Volume XVI, p. 834).

¹²¹ Hobhouse's diary talks of Ireland and Irish issues being discussed at Burdett's dinner table on several occasions in 1818 and 1819. In July 1818 Burdett and his guests dined with an Irish gentleman, Lawson, who 'seemed to doubt if the English people generally would ever regard the Irish fairly and without jealousy' (*Broughton's Recollections*, Volume II, p. 100). The following month another of Burdett's dinner guests, Fitzgerald, a naval officer, 'told many horrors of the Irish rebellion' (*ibid.*, p. 101). In November 1819 another dinner guest, Craven, 'told a story of an Irishman of consequence who changed his religion to get an estate' (*ibid.*, p. 112).

¹²² *PR*, 3rd Series, Volume XIV, p. 525.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, Volume VII, p. 49.

¹²⁴ *CPD*, Volume XIV, p. 1050.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ *Caledonian Mercury*, 11 August 1817.

¹²⁷ *Bod.*, Burdett-Coutts Papers, MSS 39458, folio 8. Burdett to Lady Burdett, 21 September 1817.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, folio 25. Burdett to Lady Burdett, 2 October 1817.

In a letter to his brother-in-law, Sir James Langham, in October 1817 Burdett remarked 'all I had read & heard about Ireland was false. Never was there a country & people so little known & so calumniated'.¹²⁹ The visit opened his eyes to Ireland's problems and to the ignorance of the British government and Irish rulers.

Burdett regarded the Orangemen, not the Catholics, as the villains of Ireland.¹³⁰ Amongst Burdett's parliamentary papers are notes for a parliamentary motion calling for an address to the King in which he claimed that the Orangemen have a 'rancorous spirit of hatred towards their Catholic fellow subjects'.¹³¹ In his 1817 letter to Langham Burdett condemned the 'Orange part' of the country as an 'odious narrow monopolising sectarian ascendancy' and criticised them for not having 'any understanding in their hearts'.¹³² In another letter to Irish lawyer Richard Newton Bennett, Burdett summed up the problems of Ireland in one sentence: 'Orange oppression and Catholic resistance'.¹³³ Burdett recognised the need for a permanent settlement of the Irish question and set about investigating how this could best be done. In the late 1810s he wrote to Lord Cloncurry for advice, asking 'I should like to know what you think would allay Irish agitation'.¹³⁴ Burdett's experiences of Irish radicalism in the late 1790s and early 1800s had taught him a valuable lesson when it came to Ireland and thereafter he developed a completely different approach when dealing with Ireland's problems. The repeated failures of Irish revolutionary efforts between 1796 and 1802 and the damaging impact it had on his own career and personal life made him realise that the only way to address Ireland's grievances was through legal and constitutional channels. If Irish Catholics were to be given the same religious and political rights as their Protestant countrymen, it had to be done through parliament, not by force, nor by separation between Britain and Ireland. In Burdett's view, the best way to solve Ireland's problems and preserve the constitutional connection between Britain and Ireland was by encouraging harmony between its

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, MSS 39452, folio 218. Burdett to James Langham, 7 October 1817.

¹³⁰ Burdett was also critical of Orangemen in his letter to Lord Stanhope in January 1799. See Bod., Burdett-Coutts Papers, MSS 39455, folio 78. Burdett to Earl Stanhope, 24 January 1799.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, MSS 39458, folio 79. The document is undated and is written in two different hands, the first of which is Burdett's, the second is unidentified.

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ *Ibid.*, folio 50. Burdett to Richard Newton Bennett, 1817.

¹³⁴ *Cloncurry's Recollections*, p. 285. The letter is undated but Cloncurry places it in his memoir among letters received in the late 1810s and early 1820s. Cloncurry described the letter as 'though

Catholic and Protestant population, and this could only be done through Catholic Emancipation. For Burdett, Emancipation and the Union should have come hand in hand. He believed that the government had betrayed the Irish Catholics in 1800. They had been 'induced'¹³⁵ to support the Union with offers of Emancipation that had not been delivered, and as a result Ireland remained in turmoil. In 1809 he claimed that the Union should have been one of 'perfect equality' with

no exclusions a real Union of heart and affection ... of equal rights and reciprocal interests. Away with that crooked policy, that narrow-minded bigotry of legislation, that intolerable intolerance, which keeps alive perpetual heart-burnings, hatred and revenge.¹³⁶

In 1827 he claimed that 'no real union could take place unless those promises [of Emancipation] ... were realised. A mere act of parliament never had, and never could, unite two countries'.¹³⁷

The Union had turned Catholics from a fairly small minority in Britain into a substantial one in the United Kingdom - to approximately a quarter of the population¹³⁸ - and had done little to solve Ireland's problems. Religious tensions, widespread violence and economic and social distress remained. The British government continued to be burdened with the problem of how to handle the Irish Catholic population, many of whom were determined to agitate for their political rights. However, several major concerns and issues prevented the passage of any Emancipation act. While some politicians in England, Burdett included, felt that Emancipation was an important step towards pacifying Ireland, a powerful majority saw the troubles in Ireland as a reason not to entrust Catholics with more power. There were also theological difficulties to overcome, such as how to reconcile Catholic beliefs with a Protestant constitution that excluded them. The veto question, which asked whether or not the Crown should have the right to delete names from the list of candidates submitted by Rome for vacant sees, and the *Exequatur*, which

short ... [it] includes within it the germ of volumes of matter' (ibid.).

¹³⁵ *PD*, New Series, Volume XII, p. 779.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, Volume XIII, p. 1050-1.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, Volume XVI, p. 839.

¹³⁸ Wolfe, J., *God and Greater Britain: Religion and National Life in Britain and Ireland 1843-1945* (London, 1994), p. 33. The 1821 census revealed that out of a population of seven million people in Ireland, six million were Catholic (Reynolds, J. A., *The Catholic Emancipation Crisis in Ireland*,

proposed that the state should have the right to scrutinise documents from Rome and decide whether or not to pass them on to Catholic clerics in Britain, were also pressing issues. Most important of all in terms of any chance of an Emancipation Act being passed, George III was completely against the idea of granting further concessions to Catholics. As a result, each time the government made efforts to introduce measures favourable to Catholics the King would thwart its attempts. In 1806 Grenville's administration, the so called 'Ministry of all the Talents', appointed a number of pro-Catholics to the Irish Executive.¹³⁹ In 1807 Grey brought forward a further measure of Catholic relief when he introduced a bill to allow Irish Catholic Officers holding commissions under the 1793 Irish Catholic Relief Act to undertake their duties in Britain as well as Ireland. The King refused to give the bill Royal Assent and the ministry collapsed. The Duke of Portland, an anti-Catholic, was invited to head a new government. The issue proved so divisive that in 1812 Liverpool was forced to insist that although individual members of the Cabinet were free to express their views on Catholic Emancipation, they must insist that their opinion did not reflect those of the entire Cabinet. This 'open system'¹⁴⁰ remained in force until Wellington was forced to introduce the Emancipation Act in 1829. Burdett frequently criticised this 'impolicy', claiming that it 'fostered and fomented'¹⁴¹ the discontent of the Catholics, endangering both Britain and Ireland. In 1823 he declared that 'It appeared, that all considerations were minor to that of preserving an equilibrium in the cabinet'.¹⁴²

Here a measure [Emancipation], which the ablest men of all parties¹⁴³ had declared to be necessary to the safety and peace of the empire, was impeded by a ministerial agreement, while Ireland was more divided, more distracted, and more wretched than at any other time - the effect of the impotent and scandalous system of policy which sacrificed public principle to the love of place, and made a despicable compromise

1823-1829 (New Haven, 1954), p. 70).

¹³⁹ Ponsonby was made Lord Chancellor of Ireland and the Duke of Bedford became Lord Lieutenant.

¹⁴⁰ Machin and Davis have written extensively on the 'open system' and how it affected the Emancipation debate. See Machin, G. I. T., 'The Catholic Emancipation Crisis of 1825', *EHR* 78 (July 1963); Davis, R. W., 'The Tories, the Whigs, and Catholic Emancipation, 1827-1829', *EHR* 97 (January 1982); Machin G. I. T., and Davis, R. W., 'Canning, Wellington and the Catholic Question, 1827-1829', *EHR* 99 (January 1984).

¹⁴¹ *PD*, New Series, Volume XX, p. 1321.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, Volume VIII, p. 1076.

between eternal justice and private interest.¹⁴⁴

Burdett supported Catholic Emancipation in the House of Commons throughout his parliamentary career. He was among the sixty-two MPs who supported Lord George Cavendish's motion on Ireland in June 1798, part of which was a resolution 'to seriously consider the situation of the Irish Catholics'.¹⁴⁵ In November 1802 he described Catholic Emancipation as 'a very important measure to the tranquilisation of the public mind in that country [Ireland]',¹⁴⁶ while in 1817 he wrote that 'No good will ever be obtained' in Ireland until Emancipation was granted and that withholding it was 'a mere humbug'.¹⁴⁷ In the House of Commons in 1812 Burdett implored the King to select ministers 'who were actuated by feelings of toleration in religious opinions, particularly with respect to the Roman Catholics of Ireland',¹⁴⁸ and in May 1817 he voted in favour of Grattan's motion for the House to go into committee to consider the Catholic claims with a view to coming to a permanent settlement of the Roman Catholic question. Burdett regarded religious toleration, Catholic Emancipation in particular, as an important constitutional rather than theological issue. Religion did not define Burdett as a politician, nor did it directly inform his politics. He did occasionally use religious references in his parliamentary speeches and in his correspondence. For example, in January 1829 Burdett remarked to Place that the situations in Ireland, Portugal, Greece and Turkey were 'more intricate and inexplicable than the revelation of St John'.¹⁴⁹ While to Hobhouse in December 1824 he wrote 'I hurried to the House full cram'd with scripture quotations'.¹⁵⁰ However, Burdett more frequently used quotes from constitutional and legal authorities, Shakespeare¹⁵¹ or classical Roman and Greek literature rather than from the Bible. Moreover, apart from Catholic Emancipation, he did not take up religious issues in parliament. His own religious belief is something that Burdett rarely spoke about. Although a communicant member of the Church of England, it seems to have been

¹⁴³ This is a reference to the Ministry of All the Talents.

¹⁴⁴ *PD*, New Series, Volume VIII, p. 1073.

¹⁴⁵ *PR*, 3rd Series, Volume VI, p. 448.

¹⁴⁶ *PR*, 4th Series, Volume I, p. 132.

¹⁴⁷ *Bod.*, Burdett-Coutts Papers, MSS 39458, folio 50. Burdett to Richard Newton Bennett, 1817.

¹⁴⁸ *The Morning Chronicle*, 22 May 1825.

¹⁴⁹ *BL*, Place Papers, Add. MSS 35148, folio 34. Burdett to Francis Place, 20 January 1829.

¹⁵⁰ *BL*, Brougham Papers, Add. MSS 36457, folio 351. Burdett to J. C. Hobhouse, 24 December 1824.

¹⁵¹ Hazlitt talks of Burdett quoting Shakespeare 'with extreme aptness and felicity' (Hazlitt, W., *The*

something that he accepted without question. Burdett was not irreverent, but neither was he devout. After the birth of his son Robert in 1796 Burdett wrote to his family chaplain, William Bagshaw Stevens stating 'The Boy waits your arrival to be initiated into the mysteries of the Church of Christ'.¹⁵² In December 1797 he remarked to Bagshaw Stevens 'I don't however give so much credit to religion as you do'.¹⁵³ In May 1801 Burdett declared in the House of Commons 'He possessed no superstitious reverence for Clergymen'.¹⁵⁴ Hobhouse described Burdett as 'no scoffer, although certainly no believer when I knew him intimately'.¹⁵⁵ He claimed that Burdett was 'a well-wisher to the Church of England as a political institution' who 'thought that, confined to its legitimate purposes and rights, it ought to be supported'.¹⁵⁶ The Emancipation debate of March 1825 is the only instance where Burdett spoke at length on his own religious belief. Of the Church of England he remarked 'I am attached to that Church, because I was born into it',¹⁵⁷ but did claim 'if I had to chose my religion again, the Church of England of all others, is that which I should adopt'.¹⁵⁸ He made similar claims in May 1828 when he remarked that he was attached to the Church of England through 'the accident of birth and education ...yet reason and principle would now lead me to adopt it'.¹⁵⁹

Although Burdett rarely concerned himself with or discussed religious matters, when he did his words reveal an open, inclusive and liberal attitude. In March 1825 Burdett declared

My own opinion, Sir, is, that all forms of religion are right - equally right - provided the persons professing them follow them with sincerity of heart; and provided they inculcate sound morality, and produce visible fruits, in the virtuous life and conversation of those who adhere to them.¹⁶⁰

In June 1825 Burdett again spoke in favour of freedom of worship, claiming it was

Spirit of the Age, 1825, p. 229).

¹⁵² *Journal of Bagshaw Stevens*, p. 377. Burdett to Stevens, 10 June 1796.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 444.

¹⁵⁴ *PR*, 3rd Series, Volume XV, p. 344.

¹⁵⁵ *Broughton's Recollections*, Volume VI, p. 102.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ *PD*, New Series, Volume XII, p. 771.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, Volume XIX, p. 378.

arrogant and impious for any set of men to dictate to the consciences of others the manner in which they should worship the Creator. It was even to say to the Creator himself, that he should not receive their worship. Religious worship, in all the forms professed by those who maintained the great principle of good-will to men and gratitude to God, must be acceptable to the Deity.¹⁶¹

Also, in March 1827 Burdett stated that the government should 'cease to persecute individuals collectively, whom they respected individually, for holding opinions in religion different from their own'.¹⁶² Thus, in terms of theology and doctrine, religion was not one of Burdett's priorities, but it was enormously important to him in terms of the links between religious freedom and liberty in general. Burdett believed 'the principle of religious freedom [is] ... the true principle of the English constitution',¹⁶³ and did not agree with the state imposing religious barriers for participation in public life. For this reason he was a staunch supporter of both Catholic Emancipation and the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts. Religious liberty was something which Burdett advocated throughout his career. In May 1812, for example, he had called for an administration formed of

men who would embrace that broad and enlightened principle of admitting into the service of the state and to the benefits of the constitution, persons of every religious persuasion, without regard to the tenets of their faith.¹⁶⁴

Two months later, in an address to the Prince Regent, Burdett urged that 'the benefits of the constitution' should be extended 'to persons of all religious persuasions, without distinction'.¹⁶⁵ In July 1824 Burdett assured members of the Catholic Association that 'they may rely on my most strenuous exertions, whenever an opportunity is afforded of promoting their just and claims on behalf of their countrymen, and the advancement of the great cause of civil and religious liberty'.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁰ *PD*, New Series, Volume XII, p. 770.

¹⁶¹ *The Times*, 27 June 1825.

¹⁶² *PD*, New Series, Volume XVI, p. 841.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, Volume XVII, p. 413.

¹⁶⁴ *PD*, Volume XXIII, p. 255.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1291.

¹⁶⁶ *The Times*, 29 July 1824.

In 1825 Burdett described 'religious freedom' as 'the stay of English security',¹⁶⁷ while in 1827 he claimed it was a principle to which he was 'most warmly attached', and one that was 'sanctioned by God'.¹⁶⁸ Burdett welcomed the repeal of the Test and Corporations Acts in February 1828, celebrating it as a 'victory over prejudice, bigotry, and injustice'.¹⁶⁹ He did not speak in the House during the debates on the bill but it was a measure that he wholeheartedly supported as a step in the right direction towards religious freedom, which was 'the only principle calculated to give [the Country] happiness'.¹⁷⁰

Burdett saw Ireland's problems as constitutional rather than economic and political. Although he sympathised with the material plight of the Irish people, Burdett believed that their lot would be improved once their constitutional rights were restored, seeing political and religious liberty as the key to economic and social improvement. He did not want to bring about any change in the social structure of Ireland. In April 1823 Burdett revealed his anger and frustration at the government's repeated failure to address the Catholic question, calling the debates on the issue an

annual farce carried on, year after year, for a great length of time, and conducive to no good purpose the House had been repeatedly called upon to waste its time in useless discussion. The people of Ireland had again and again been excited to the utmost pitch of expectation; and again and again had they learned that their feelings had only been trifled with and insulted.¹⁷¹

Burdett refused to take any further part 'in that farce concerning the Catholics'¹⁷² and when the speaker called on Plunket to read his petition on the Catholic claims Burdett and several other members - John Cam Hobhouse, Thomas Creevey, Lord Sefton and Sir Robert Wilson among them - left the House.¹⁷³ In June 1824 Burdett presented a petition of the Roman Catholic Association to the House of Commons, in which the

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 24 May 1825.

¹⁶⁸ *PD*, New Series, Volume XVII, p. 413.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, Volume XIX, p. 404.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ *PD*, New Series, Volume VIII, p. 1071-2.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 1076.

¹⁷³ As a result of this Burdett, and those who left the House with him, were unable to vote on the motion proposing that the debate on the Catholic issue be adjourned indefinitely. It was passed by more than two hundred votes.

petitioners asked 'to participate in those advantages which the constitution undoubtedly held out to all who were within its protection'.¹⁷⁴ Meanwhile in Ireland, a Catholic barrister, Daniel O'Connell had established the Catholic Association, a body designed to agitate for the removal of all restrictions upon Catholics. In February 1825 O'Connell led a Catholic delegation to London, hoping to draw opposition politicians, such as Burdett, and prominent English Catholics into the campaign.

III

Between 1825 and 1829 Burdett was the principal English parliamentary advocate of Catholic Emancipation, bringing the subject before the House more than any other MP in this period. Burdett was responsible for two Catholic Relief Bills - in 1825, which passed all three of its readings in the Commons, the first Catholic bill to do so since 1821,¹⁷⁵ and in 1827 - as well as proposing several motions recommending the House consider Catholic relief and presenting a number of Catholic petitions. Emancipation was an issue that Burdett saw as being of great importance, as he believed that there would be no peace in Ireland until 'this great preliminary stumbling-block to all improvement were removed'.¹⁷⁶ Granting Emancipation was a 'sound policy' of 'wisdom and reason'.¹⁷⁷ It would ensure the security of Ireland and thus the security of the British Empire by uniting 'two great nations in one constitutional bond'.¹⁷⁸ After all the other relaxations of the penal laws that had been granted to the Catholics since the mid-eighteenth century, Burdett regarded political emancipation as the next logical step. In March 1827 he claimed it was 'a most preposterous thing, after having freed Ireland from that oppressive code' to keep her in 'a state of enthrallment'¹⁷⁹ by denying Catholics their political rights. In a letter to Robert Wilmot Horton, MP for Newcastle-under-Lyme and under-secretary of state for war and the colonies, in October 1827 Burdett claimed that the pacification of

¹⁷⁴ *PD*, New Series, Volume XI, p. 1438.

¹⁷⁵ Plunket's 1821 Relief Bill was passed by six votes, but was defeated by thirty-nine votes in the Lords. Burdett did not vote on this measure as he was in prison for his Peterloo libel at the time.

¹⁷⁶ *PD*, New Series, Volume XV, p. 567.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 566.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, Volume XVI, p. 841.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 837.

Ireland was of primary importance and that all other issues 'were of inferior importance to the great problem of relieving the country from the dreadful consequences of an over-stimulated population'.¹⁸⁰ Burdett regarded Catholic Emancipation as 'the means of preserving the present tranquillity in Ireland' and 'of opening a brighter and more cheerful prospect for the future'.¹⁸¹ He hoped that bringing an end to the troubles in Ireland would lead to investment in Irish industry and greater general prosperity. In 1828 he claimed that there was not 'any single grievance to which this measure would not bring some alleviation'.¹⁸² However, Burdett was realistic enough to realise that Emancipation would not be 'a panacea for all the evils which afflict Ireland'.¹⁸³ It was merely 'the first step, the sine qua non, of all the other measures which it may be necessary to adopt for the relief of Ireland'.¹⁸⁴

Burdett was deeply committed to Emancipation. In March 1825 he described himself as having 'warm and zealous feeling in the cause of the Catholics'.¹⁸⁵ This was partly because he believed it was the first step towards the pacification of Ireland, but was also because religious freedom formed an integral part of his wider political agenda, which centred upon the restoration of constitutional rights and liberties which had been subverted by successive governments since the Glorious Revolution. In 1824 Burdett remarked 'the question of emancipation was only the question of general liberty, in which all were concerned'.¹⁸⁶ At the Annual General Meeting of the British Catholic Association in June 1825 Burdett declared it 'was his determination in every way to support the broad principle of religious liberty'.¹⁸⁷ Burdett used the same tactics in his arguments in favour of Emancipation as he used in his other parliamentary campaigns: historical precedent.¹⁸⁸ His parliamentary speeches during the Emancipation debates made extensive use of historical examples in order to demonstrate that the rights the Catholics were agitating for had in fact originally been

¹⁸⁰ Wilmot-Horton, R., *An Inquiry into the Causes and Remedies of Pauperism, Third Series: Containing Letters to Sir Francis Burdett, BT., M.P., upon Pauperism in Ireland* (London, 1830), p. 1-2.

¹⁸¹ *PD*, New Series, Volume XII, p. 784.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, Volume XIX, p. 413.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, Volume XII, p. 783.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 784.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 764.

¹⁸⁶ *The Times*, 27 June 1825.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ See Chapter 1, Section I.

granted to them, but had since been subverted by the penal laws, 'a set of laws the most sanguinary and cruel'.¹⁸⁹ In the Commons in March 1825 Burdett argued that the Treaty of Limerick of 1691, agreed between the Irish Catholics and William III, provided for

the free and unconstrained exercise of their [Catholic] religion; together with all other advantages possessed by the rest of the king's subjects they were not to be compelled to take the oath of supremacy.¹⁹⁰

At a Westminster dinner in May 1825 Burdett himself linked his support for Emancipation with his desire to restore what he regarded as the ancient rights and liberties that had been undermined by government encroachments. Burdett claimed that he supported the 'great principle of religious liberty'¹⁹¹ and asserted there was 'no greater cause - no better foundation for the recovery of these constitutional liberties to which we lay claim'.¹⁹² In his 1827 relief motion Burdett again referred to the Treaty of Limerick, quoting the first two articles, arguing that it promised all Catholics the same rights and liberties as their Protestant countrymen.¹⁹³ Thus, the House was 'bound by considerations of good faith'¹⁹⁴ to grant Emancipation. Burdett also appealed to more recent examples in order to win over parliamentary opponents, claiming that 'the cause of the Catholics had received the sanction of the most eminent men of the country ... it had been supported by Burke, by Fox, by Pitt, by Sheridan, and "last, not least", by Grattan'.¹⁹⁵ In a more direct appeal to the Tory opponents of the measure, Burdett claimed that it had been Pitt's intention to grant Emancipation along with the Union and remarked that it was 'surprising' that those who claimed to be followers of Pitt were opposed to 'the greatest of all that minister's measures'.¹⁹⁶ In 1828 Burdett argued that by granting Emancipation parliament would be fulfilling obligations to the Catholics 'due, on the ground of good faith

¹⁸⁹ *PD*, New Series, Volume XII, p. 769.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 768.

¹⁹¹ *The Times*, 24 May 1825.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ Peel protested at this, claiming that the Treaty only referred to the Catholics of the Limerick garrison and other garrisons in the possession of the Irish. Burdett rejected this claim, referring to the ninth article of the treaty, asserting that it comprehended 'all submitting Catholics generally It would be most monstrous and preposterous, that those who were not in arms - those who had given the least offence - should be divested of the advantages which were conceded to their more hostile countrymen' (*PD*, New Series, Volume XVI, p. 832).

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 831.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 826.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 837-8.

pledged to them at the Union' and 'previously by the Treaty of Limerick',¹⁹⁷ which he regarded as 'the Magna Charta of the Roman Catholics of Ireland'.¹⁹⁸

Burdett was fiercely critical of those who opposed Emancipation on theological grounds. He rejected the idea that Emancipation would have a negative effect on the Protestant Church of Ireland; rather it would strengthen it by removing its reliance on 'penal statutes and the bayonets of soldiers', which Burdett believed was 'an ill compliment to any church'.¹⁹⁹ He also scorned those who equated Catholicism with tyranny and opposed Emancipation out of a fear of a 'Popish plot', which he regarded as 'about as absurd as ... ghosts and witches'.²⁰⁰ In March 1825 he dismissed the perceived threat from Catholicism as having 'nothing to do with the world as it now exists',²⁰¹ and criticised those who used it as a reason not to grant Catholic Emancipation. In March 1827 Burdett criticised the government for embarrassing Britain among the other countries of Europe, in all of which, except Spain, 'men of all religions were freely admissible to offices of rank and power'.²⁰² In Britain 'which once occupied the very first rank as a liberal country' and 'whose liberal institutions formerly served as a model of imitation for less-favoured nations',²⁰³ a 'system of intolerance ... was still adhered to ... that was not unworthy of the dark ages'.²⁰⁴ For Burdett, the 'imaginary danger'²⁰⁵ posed by popery, was far less important than the 'the real danger'²⁰⁶ posed by unrest in Ireland, which would escalate unless the Catholic question was adequately addressed. In May 1828 Burdett remarked that no man could use the fear of popery outside the house 'without being laughed at, or considered as a subject for Bedlam'.²⁰⁷ He poured scorn on the idea that Catholicism was a subversive force and focused on the past and present loyalty of English and Irish Catholics to the Crown of England, denying that examples of violence and tyranny were confined to Catholicism, remarking

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, Volume XIX, p. 396.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 379.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 415.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, Volume XVI, p. 843.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, Volume XII, p. 772.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, Volume XVI, p. 841.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 841-2.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 842.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, Volume XII, p. 839.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, Volume XIX, p. 403.

violent men have committed atrocious acts in all times and in all countries, whatever might have been their religion All religions have been made use of for purposes of violence, oppression, and injustice.²⁰⁸

Burdett also reminded the House that Elizabeth I trusted her Catholic subjects even though the Pope had excommunicated her and given Catholics sanction to kill her. The head of Elizabeth's navy, Lord Howard, was a Catholic; 'Thus, Sir, did the Catholics of those days resist Catholic powers and the pope to boot, in defence of their country'.²⁰⁹ The Commons should 'ask ourselves, whether it may not be worth our while to take a lesson from the page of English history to apply to Ireland'.²¹⁰

Burdett's dedication to the cause of religious liberty was such that he was willing to make significant sacrifices in order to see the Emancipation bill passed. The 1825 Relief Bill contained two highly controversial elements, the securities or 'wings': a provision for the state payment of Catholic clergy and the disenfranchisement of the forty-shilling freeholders in Ireland, the Catholics who had been given the vote under Hobart's Act in 1793. They were designed to quell any fears that the English establishment had about Emancipation and ease the passage of the act through the House. As soon as news of the securities, particularly the freehold wing, reached the Irish public there was uproar. In agreeing to the wings, Burdett was seemingly abandoning his reform principles, for which he faced fierce criticism. In his *Weekly Political Register* William Cobbett claimed that, as a result of the securities, the 1825 bill was 'emancipation in name, perpetual slavery in reality'.²¹¹ He attacked Burdett for turning his back on reform, remarking

Document upon document have come from under his pen, speech upon speech from his lips, insisting that *all men* had a right to vote And is this the same man who is now about to propose to disenfranchise nine-tenths of the freeholders of Ireland?²¹²

John Lawless, a prominent member of the committee of the Catholic Association who strongly opposed the securities, wrote to the editor of *The Times* 'why Sir Francis

²⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 407-8.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 412.

²¹⁰ Ibid., p. 413.

²¹¹ *Cobbett's Weekly Political Register*, 19 March 1812.

²¹² Ibid.

Burdett and O'Connell, both honest reformers, should treat the Irish peasantry thus, is a riddle I cannot solve'.²¹³ At a Westminster meeting on 24 March 1825 Henry Hunt expressed disbelief that Burdett would support the measure, assuring the Westminster electors, 'He was well convinced that their long tried Representative would never consent to a measure, the object of which was to disenfranchise nearly half a million of poor but honest subjects'.²¹⁴ He also attempted to propose a resolution expressing the people's opposition to the measure but was prevented from doing so. Burdett, who was present at the meeting, responded, claiming

The term "disenfranchisement was usually understood in a bad sense; but if he were to propose that the electors of Old Sarum, or other rotten voters, were disenfranchised, would they find fault with him? ... All that was said about disenfranchising the people of Ireland related to votes of that description. There was no similitude between the 40s. Freeholders of Ireland and those in England."²¹⁵

He also justified the measure by pointing out 'how extremely difficult it was to settle anything calculated to produce peace and prosperity to Ireland' and remarking 'It was impossible to devise any particular measure to which all men would agree'.²¹⁶ It was clear that the securities would cause problems. O'Connell wrestled with his conscience over whether or not to accept them. While he defended Burdett against attack from Lawless, condemning him for his rudeness towards Burdett,²¹⁷ he also recognised that the wings would be controversial, remarking 'If we concede the freeholds, we shall get over many enemies but we shall perhaps lose some who at least call themselves our friends'.²¹⁸ However, he agreed to them hoping it would ease the passage of the bill through the House. John Cam Hobhouse, Burdett's close friend and fellow MP for Westminster, remarked that the wings 'were perhaps defensible, but they have given rise to much difference of opinion amongst the supporters of the principal bill'.²¹⁹

²¹³ *The Times*, 16 March 1825.

²¹⁴ *The Morning Chronicle*, 25 March 1825.

²¹⁵ *The Examiner*, 27 March 1825.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*

²¹⁷ O'Connell wrote to his wife that Lawless 'would hardly allow Sir Francis to speak on the subject. You cannot conceive any thing so rude as his manner was to Sir Francis' (O'Connell, *Correspondence*, Volume III, p. 130-1. O'Connell to Mary O'Connell, 7 March 1825).

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 152. O'Connell to Mary O'Connell, 22 April 1825.

²¹⁹ *Broughton's Recollections*, Volume III, p. 94.

For Burdett the securities were a way of saving his relief bill and he was prepared to concede them on these grounds. On 28 March 1825 he declared to the House

If the necessity of the case required it, he would be ready to support this proposed measure respecting the elective franchise, in order to carry that question of paramount importance, Catholic emancipation he was willing to make great sacrifices to obtain the emancipation of the Catholics.²²⁰

The following month he again defended his decision, remarking that he was not 'less attached to the cause of reform than he had always been'²²¹ but could not 'permit any abstract principles, however pure and admirable, and beautiful, to stand in the way of his concurrence in so great and practical a benefit'.²²² In the current climate parliamentary reform was a redundant issue and its chances of success slim. Emancipation, on the other hand, appeared to be on the verge of being granted. Burdett claimed that reform and Emancipation

stood on different grounds in point of urgency. It could not be said, that reform was a matter of immediate policy and necessity [but] who could tell what might happen, if justice to the Catholics of Ireland was much longer delayed?²²³

Burdett's sacrifice was in vain as the 1825 Bill was defeated in the Lords. Hobhouse remarked 'Little was gained and something was lost by the sacrifices made by Burdett and his friends'.²²⁴ In the House of Commons in May 1825 Plunket criticised the Bill, claiming that it had been proposed 'without his advice having been taken. Had his opinions been asked at the time of its introduction, he should certainly have said, that the period chosen was unfortunate'.²²⁵ Burdett however defended his motion, asserting that the Catholic claims 'had been more advanced by the discussion during the present session than at any former period'.²²⁶

²²⁰ *PD*, New Series, Volume XII, p. 1253-4.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, Volume XIII, p. 239.

²²² *Ibid.*, p. 240.

²²³ *Ibid.*, p. 897.

²²⁴ *Broughton's Recollections*, Volume III, p. 98.

²²⁵ *PD*, New Series, Volume XIII, p. 886.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 894.

Burdett did not include any securities or 'wings' in his 1827 relief motion, nor did he propose them in the House again. In 1828 he claimed that securities would have 'no value' as 'The great security for Church and State is - equal laws and equal justice If, I say, there are those still who seek securities, it is for them to propose them'.²²⁷ The securities had been designed to ease the passage of Emancipation and Burdett's support for them was on those terms. However, the storm of protest they created in Ireland and amongst English Whigs and radicals had actually endangered support for the bill. In the House of Commons, Joseph Hume, the radical MP for Aberdeen, had called upon 'all the advocates of parliamentary reform to oppose this obnoxious bill'²²⁸ and claimed he would rather vote against Emancipation than in favour of the disenfranchisement bill. The increase in support that the 'wings' had gained in the House of Commons was actually counteracted by the number of pro-Catholic Whigs and radicals, including Hobhouse, who refused to vote for the bill because of their opposition to the securities. For Burdett, to push for the securities in 1827 would not have been politically expedient and could have actually damaged the chances of a relief bill being passed. By 1829 the situation had changed and with it Burdett's position on the securities. The repeal of the Test and Corporations Acts in February 1828 and O'Connell's election for County Clare²²⁹ in June had forced Wellington's Ultra Tory government to seriously consider Emancipation or risk civil war in Ireland. The securities made the relief bill much more palatable for its former opponents. Burdett agreed to support the freehold wing in 1829 'on the clear understanding, that this was to form a part of the great principle of compromise';²³⁰ although he was keen to point out that 'He had nothing to do with this measure as considered by itself'.²³¹ It was 'the price that was demanded ... for the purchase of so valuable a measure'.²³²

Burdett made further compromises with his reform principles, and indeed his independent status, when he decided to support the premiership of George Canning in

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, Volume XIX, p. 418-9.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, Volume XIII, p. 464.

²²⁹ Although a Catholic was ineligible to sit in the House, there was no legal obstacle to his being nominated as a candidate.

²³⁰ *PD*, New Series, Volume XX, p. 1375.

²³¹ *Ibid.*

²³² *Ibid.*, p. 1376.

April 1827.²³³ Canning was pro-Catholic but firmly opposed to parliamentary reform and in the past Burdett had criticised him heavily.²³⁴ The two men rarely saw eye to eye in the House. In 1820, during debates on a motion concerning the fate of government spy George Edwards, Canning remarked, 'There certainly were no two persons at greater variance on the subject of politics than the hon. Baronet and himself'.²³⁵ Burdett even described himself as being 'almost invariably opposed to the late Mr. Canning, during the far greater part of my political life'.²³⁶ Once again, Burdett was castigated by his former radical allies for seemingly turning his back on reform. However, for him it was a matter of practicality and realism. Burdett saw the new administration as 'A dawn of hope'²³⁷ for Ireland and supported it

because it affords the best opportunity I have ever yet met with of promoting that great cause for which I have been, ever since the commencement of my public life, most eagerly struggling - the cause of civil and religious freedom.²³⁸

He acknowledged his support was 'not entirely, perhaps, upon the foundations of a complete concurrence upon abstract principles'.²³⁹ Yet, with Canning facing staunch opposition from those within his own party - Peel, for example, resigned as Home Secretary²⁴⁰ - it was vital that men like Burdett support him if Emancipation were to stand any chance of success. Burdett defended his decision to support the government by stating that he was 'a practical man' who did not 'think it common sense to omit the opportunity of advancing a particular object, because there are principles of an abstract nature on which you are at issue'.²⁴¹ To Hobhouse Burdett described it 'as a

²³³ In the parliamentary records for 1 May 1827 it is stated that Burdett was seated 'behind Mr. Canning' (Ibid., Volume XVII, p. 412).

²³⁴ In 1814 Burdett fiercely attacked Canning for accepting the post of Ambassador to Lisbon from his rival Castlereagh, with whom Canning had duelled in 1809. In 1818 Burdett and Canning themselves almost duelled over comments made by Burdett in a letter to the chairman of a Reform dinner. In 1823 Canning criticised Burdett and the others who had seceded from the House during the debates on Plunket's Catholic Relief Bill, claiming that if the bill failed they would have only themselves to blame. Also, in December 1826, just months before his decision to cross the floor of the House in support of Canning, Burdett had attacked him in the Commons over foreign policy.

²³⁵ *PD*, New Series, Volume I, p. 293.

²³⁶ Ibid., Volume XIX, p. 376

²³⁷ Ibid., Volume XVII, p. 414.

²³⁸ Ibid., p. 413.

²³⁹ Ibid., p. 414.

²⁴⁰ In the Commons Burdett declared that he 'rejoiced' to see Peel 'separated from the administration, considering him, as I do, an insuperable obstacle to the adoption of a great public measure' (Ibid., p. 416).

²⁴¹ Ibid., p. 415.

choice of evils. If the Whigs did not now support Canning, the bigots would come in'.²⁴² Canning's death, in August 1827, was to Burdett a 'subject of unmitigated regret'²⁴³ as it crushed hopes of Emancipation being granted in that session. He urged his fellow MPs to support Goderich, Canning's successor, hoping to stave off the institution of an Ultra Tory, anti-Catholic ministry. Burdett's willingness to abandon political principles he held dear, albeit temporarily, to ensure the passage of Emancipation demonstrates his devotion to the cause of liberty and the pragmatism that characterised his political conduct. He was prepared to risk harsh criticism from his former allies, and unpopularity with his Westminster constituents in order to see the act passed. Lord Holland complimented Burdett for his dedication to Emancipation, recognising the sacrifices he had made and the contribution he had made to the campaign, remarking,

Here is Burdett braving his darling popularity in some of its tenderest points, and on the other hand conciliating his bitterest enemies, for the purpose of accomplishing what he considers as a great benefit to the country: and he is in some measure rewarded by finding that his *character* diminishes not a little the unpopularity, and thereby removes one great obstacle to the measure.²⁴⁴

Burdett's role in securing the passage of Catholic Emancipation has been almost completely overlooked in works on the early nineteenth century.²⁴⁵ However, at the time, Burdett was regarded as a major player in the Emancipation campaign. His speech in defence of O'Connell and the Catholic Association in February 1825 was described in *The Monthly Repository* as 'masterly ... the hearers of the debate pronounced it to have been the best delivered during this great contest'.²⁴⁶ The following month, after Burdett had presented his first relief motion, an Irishman, J. A. S. Reilly, wrote to Burdett, remarking that his 'splendid advocacy of the claims of the Catholics - so manly - so temperate, has called forth the grateful and lasting

²⁴² *Broughton's Recollections*, Volume III, p. 187.

²⁴³ *PD*, New Series, Volume XIX, p. 376.

²⁴⁴ Ilchester, Earl of, *Chronicles of Holland House 1820-1900* (London, 1937), p. 66.

²⁴⁵ See Chapter 4, Section I.

²⁴⁶ *The Monthly Repository of Theology and General Literature*, 2 February 1825.

admiration of our people'.²⁴⁷ In April 1825 'a Protestant Landlord in Ireland' addressed Burdett in a public letter, referring to the 1825 Relief Bill as 'your Bill' and claiming that Emancipation was 'inseparable from the government and tranquillity [of Ireland]'.²⁴⁸ At a Dublin dinner in November 1828 a toast was raised to 'Sir Francis Burdett, the uniform advocate of religious liberty'²⁴⁹ and Thomas Hyde Villiers, MP for Hedon in Yorkshire, complimented Burdett on 'his able, persevering, and most valuable advocacy of the Catholic claims'.²⁵⁰ A few days later a meeting of supporters of Emancipation held in Leeds described Burdett's Relief Bill as 'The very bill which has gone beyond all others in opening the door of office to the Roman Catholics'.²⁵¹ Burdett's central role in the campaign is also reflected in the prints of the period, several of which criticised him for supporting the campaign. Isaac Cruikshank's *Defenders of the Faith* (May 1825) shows a monk running up to the Duke of York with a cross asking him to kiss it 'in the name of the Pope and Saint Frances', a reference to Burdett who had introduced the Emancipation Bill to the House of Commons in March 1825.²⁵² In *The CONSTITUTION of John Bull DESTROYED by the Combined Efforts of the BURKITES* (1829), inspired by the Burke and Hare murders, John Bull is the victim of Wellington and Peel, aided by Burdett and O'Connell.²⁵³ Pamphlets and handbills also mention Burdett directly in their arguments either for or against Emancipation. One such pamphlet, entitled *Slap at Burdett!! Crimes of the Catholics, History of the Inquisition and Duke of York's Speech against Popery* (1825), remarks,

We cannot conclude without commenting on the extraordinary conduct of Sir Francis Burdett, in becoming the champion of the Catholics. That he is the steady friend of universal liberty, must be admitted; but who, in their senses, would think of turning the *lions* of the Tower loose upon Cornhill, merely because, by long confinement, they had assumed a *lamb-like appearance*.²⁵⁴

²⁴⁷ Bod., Burdett-Coutts Papers, MSS 39458, folio 54. J. A. S. Reilly to Burdett, 7 March 1825.

²⁴⁸ *The Morning Chronicle*, 19 April 1825.

²⁴⁹ *The Times*, 2 December 1828.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 8 December 1828.

²⁵² BMS 14768. See Appendix 3.

²⁵³ BMS 15708. See Appendix 4.

²⁵⁴ *Slap at Burdett!! Crimes of the Catholics, History of the Inquisition and Duke of York's Speech against Popery* (London, 1825), p. 4.

A handbill of the same year, in favour of Emancipation, has part of one of Burdett's parliamentary speeches on one side and a declaration calling for unity and harmony amongst Catholics and Protestants on the other.²⁵⁵

Burdett was also regarded as a significant rallying point for Irish issues. In 1826 Robert Wilmot Horton wrote to Burdett on the subject of Irish emigration,²⁵⁶ remarking 'I appreciate too highly the prejudice which the authority of your name is likely to create upon the subject'.²⁵⁷ O'Connell too recognised early on how important an ally Burdett could be. He first attempted to make contact in June 1817 on a visit to London, when he 'left [his] card for Sir Francis Burdett'²⁵⁸ at the King's Bench. A month later, at a meeting of the Catholic Board, O'Connell proposed a vote of thanks to Burdett for his 'just representation of the Irish Catholics'.²⁵⁹ There is also evidence among O'Connell's correspondence to suggest that he tried to contact

²⁵⁵ The Handbill has no title and the inscription on one side reads as follows:

Protestants! Be not misled by the false and unchristian calumnies put forth, in treasonable and rebellious paragraphs, against your CATHOLIC BRETHERN and HIS MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT. The Catholics of the British Empire have always proved themselves to be Loyal and True to their KING and COUNTRY. Their earnest wish is to live in Peace and Harmony with their PROTESTANT BRETHERN. Join then, heart and hand, with your Gracious Sovereign, with his faithful Ministers, and with his enlightened Senators, in their glorious design of restoring to persecuted Catholics, the Rights and Privileges of FREE-BORN ENGLISHMEN!

It was printed in London in 1825.

²⁵⁶ Many, including Wilmot Horton, saw emigration as a way of solving poverty and unrest in Ireland. In 1815 Peel proposed a scheme of assisted emigration to Canada but it was rejected by the Cabinet. While at the colonial office Wilmot Horton encouraged a number of subsidised emigration experiments, with varying success. In 1823 and 1825 two emigrations from overpopulated areas of Ireland were arranged by the government. Burdett opposed emigration because it tended to remove the most essential workers from the country, namely young men and women, thus damaging the economy. During debates on Lord Althorp's motion on the state of Ireland, 11 May 1824, Burdett claimed that 'Emigration was going on too fast in Ireland already and persons who possessed industry, talent, and moderate capital, were carrying their means away'. Instead he encouraged 'colonization', namely the removal of Irish peasants to other parts of the empire in order to relieve the distress in Ireland caused by the 'superabundant population' (*PD*, New Series, Volume XI, p. 708-9).

²⁵⁷ Wilmot Horton, R. J., *A letter to Sir F. Burdett, in reply to his speech in opposing a Parliamentary grant of £30,000 for the purpose of emigration* (London, 1826), p. 72. Burdett replied to Wilmot Horton outlining his objections to such a plan, remarking, 'you intended to aid persons of small capital to leave the country, leaving the paupers behind increased and increasing, and that you did not propose any steps to be taken to prevent the measure of pauperism being filled up as fast as emptied out'. (Derbyshire Record Office, Papers of Wilmot Horton of Osmaston and Catton, D3155/WH3046, Burdett to Robert Wilmot Horton [1826]. The letter is undated as only the second half of it survives. However, I believe it was written sometime in 1826, partly as I believe it to be a response to Wilmot-Horton's letter, but also because the letter is not in Burdett's handwriting, but that of either his wife or one of his daughters, who often wrote letters on his behalf when his gout made it impossible for him to write. In 1826 Burdett's gout left him housebound for some weeks).

²⁵⁸ O'Connell, *Correspondence*, Volume II, p. 147. O'Connell to Mary O'Connell, 10 June 1817.

²⁵⁹ Huish, R., *The Memoirs, Private and Political, of Daniel O'Connell, Esq: From the Year 1776 to the Close of the Proceedings in Parliament, for the Repeal of the Union. Compiled From Official*

Burdett again in 1821. On 26 May 1821 O'Connell received a letter from his former clerk and fellow lawyer John Bric remarking that should O'Connell come to London he should 'Bring with [him] letters to Burdett'.²⁶⁰ In January 1824, at a Catholic Association meeting, O'Connell praised Burdett as 'the scion of English honour and independence'.²⁶¹ The rest of the Catholic Association were also keen to procure Burdett's help and support. In November 1824, when he was selected as the London agent of the Catholic Association, O'Connell was instructed by the Association 'to enter into immediate contact with Sir F. Burdett, and our other friends in Parliament, respecting our views and wishes as to the management of our petitions during the next session'.²⁶² He was also told to 'concert with [Burdett] the best means of presenting a petition for Emancipation before the House of Commons in the next parliamentary session'.²⁶³ As a result, when O'Connell and his Catholic delegation arrived in London, in February 1825, visiting Burdett was a top priority. O'Connell wrote 'On our arrival [in London] we dressed and proceeded to Sir Francis Burdett'.²⁶⁴

O'Connell's correspondence, particularly the letters to his wife Mary, offers some explanation as to why Burdett has been viewed as something of a secondary player in the Emancipation campaign. In a letter to his wife on 4 March 1825, O'Connell remarked, 'If I had not been here [in London], nothing would have been done. I forced Sir Francis Burdett to bring on his motion'.²⁶⁵ Three days later, after attending a dinner at the Duke of Norfolk's, at which Burdett and several other important political figures were present, O'Connell remarked, 'You cannot think how everybody says that it is *I* who am carrying emancipation, that it will be carried this sessions I look on as nearly certain'.²⁶⁶ O'Connell also implied that he coached Burdett on how to present the bill in parliament. On 19 April he told his wife, 'I was a good while tête-à-tête with Sir Francis Burdett and he will, I think, make a great exhibition. I

Documents (London, 1836), p. 222.

²⁶⁰ O'Connell, *Correspondence*, Volume II, p. 323. John Bric to Daniel O'Connell, 26 May 1821.

²⁶¹ *Proceedings of the Catholic Association in Dublin, From May 13, 1823, to February 11, 1825* (London, 1825), p. 168.

²⁶² *The Times*, 10 November 1824.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁴ O'Connell, *Correspondence*, Volume III, p. 113. O'Connell to Mary O'Connell, 18 February 1825.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 129. O'Connell to Mary O'Connell, 4 March 1825.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 131. O'Connell to Mary O'Connell, 7 March 1825.

think him much better prepared this time than the last'.²⁶⁷ O'Connell and his supporters clearly believed that they had a significant influence over Burdett. In a letter to O'Connell, John Barclay Sheil, a doctor from Ballyshannon in Northern Ireland, claimed, 'but for *your* influence he [Burdett] would never have been chosen [by the Catholic Association] to present the petitions for the Catholics of Ireland'.²⁶⁸

Burdett denied that O'Connell was the dominant voice in formulating the 1825 bill. In the House of Commons in March 1825 Burdett acknowledged that O'Connell had been consulted by the committee selected by the Commons to draw up the Catholic Relief Bill²⁶⁹ for 'exact information on the state of the public mind in Ireland and on the safest mode to be resorted to for quietening the uneasy state of the country'.²⁷⁰ He also admitted that O'Connell 'had been requested to draw up a rough sketch of a bill'.²⁷¹ However, he claimed that this 'draught was thrown aside' and another bill prepared 'in exact conformity with one of the same nature, which had already passed the House; and this was neither framed by Mr. O'Connell, nor was he at all consulted about it'.²⁷² The idea that O'Connell directed Burdett was probably the result of O'Connell's natural exaggeration of his own role in affairs in order to impress his wife. Burdett was fiercely independent in all matters and although amenable to advice and information from O'Connell,²⁷³ particularly on the situation in Ireland, Burdett would not have taken direction from him. He certainly would not have responded well to any sort of pressure from O'Connell, whom he would have regarded as being beneath him both socially and politically.²⁷⁴ Burdett knew what he wanted to achieve by Emancipation and probably had a time scale for it mapped out in his mind. English supporters of Emancipation, Burdett included, spent months debating the finer points

²⁶⁷ O'Connell, *Correspondence*, Volume III, p. 150. O'Connell to Mary O'Connell, 19 April 1825.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, Volume IV, p. 71. John Barclay Sheil to O'Connell, 23 May 1829.

²⁶⁹ The committee was appointed during debates on the Catholic Claims in March 1825 and included Burdett, Plunket, Tierney, Canning and Viscount Palmerston.

²⁷⁰ *PD*, New Series, Volume VII, p. 1256.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*

²⁷² *Ibid.*

²⁷³ As well as O'Connell, Burdett met with several leading political figures in order to court support for the bill, particularly 'Lord Grey, and the leaders of the opposition', including Lords Donoughmore and Holland, and the Dukes of Norfolk and Devonshire. (O'Connell, *Correspondence*, Volume III, p. 161. O'Connell to Mary O'Connell, 4 May 1825).

²⁷⁴ A print by John Doyle entitled *High Bred, Low Bred* (11 December 1835) highlights the social differences between the two men. Burdett is depicted as a pedigree greyhound while O'Connell is shown as a bulldog. See Bod., John Johnson Political and Satirical Prints Collection, Political Cartoons

of the bill, and believed that careful planning ensured the best possible chance of securing its passage through both Houses. O'Connell himself noted that 'The progress of the bill in the House of Commons has been unusually slow'²⁷⁵ and that English politicians, in general, were not as 'zealous'²⁷⁶ about Emancipation as he expected. In stark contrast to this, O'Connell wanted immediate action. Next to the constant procrastination of English politicians, O'Connell's impatience appeared, then and now, to indicate a greater degree of commitment to the cause. He quickly became frustrated and as 1825 wore on, it becomes clear that O'Connell's visit to London became less about courting support for Emancipation from influential men in politics, and more about taking a leading role himself in the campaign.

Burdett's relationship with O'Connell was an interesting one, the course of which was to have a significant impact on the direction of Burdett's career, particularly in the late 1830s. Even before meeting O'Connell personally,²⁷⁷ Burdett recognised that his popularity amongst the Irish people and the work of the Catholic Association was crucial in maintaining the delicate balance between peace and civil war in Ireland. With O'Connell and the Association on their side Burdett believed that advances could be made. It was important not to alienate them. Should O'Connell become disillusioned with the parliamentary progress of Emancipation, he might decide to take radical measures in order to obtain Catholics their rights and liberties, with disastrous consequences for Ireland. Burdett had experience of the dangers of extreme Irish radicalism, and had witnessed the resulting horrors in the late 1790s. He was keen not to see the same thing happen again. In the Commons on 15 February 1825 Burdett defended O'Connell and the Catholic Association during debates on the Unlawful Societies in Ireland Bill.²⁷⁸ He described O'Connell as 'a man whose heart

5 (241).

²⁷⁵ O'Connell, *Correspondence*, Volume III, p. 163. O'Connell to Mary O'Connell, 5 May 1825. The second reading of the bill was postponed from 14 to 19 April.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 117. O'Connell to Mary O'Connell, 21 February 1825.

²⁷⁷ Burdett knew about O'Connell's intentions and activities in Ireland through his contacts amongst the deputies of the Catholic Association, men such as Eneas MacDonnell and Nicholas Purcell O'Gorman. Early contact between O'Connell and Burdett was conducted via these deputies. For example in January 1825 O'Connell instructed MacDonnell to 'See [Burdett] or write to him' (*Ibid.*, p. 105. O'Connell to Eneas MacDonnell, 31 January 1825).

²⁷⁸ True to his reputation as a defender of rights and liberties, Burdett opposed the bill, describing it as 'a childish tampering with the liberty of the subject, which no liberal policy should ever countenance' (*PD*, New Series, Volume XII, p. 458). Some pro-Catholics, such as Plunket and Canning, supported the bill, seeing it as a way of easing the passage of Emancipation.

was bursting with the wrongs of his country'²⁷⁹ and claimed that the Catholic Association, 'the organ of six millions of Catholics in Ireland',²⁸⁰ was

in favour, not of violence, but of patience; it prayed of the Catholics to go on prosecuting a constitutional object by constitutional means; and not to allow their minds to be irritated, even by the violence and injustice of their oppressors.²⁸¹

Burdett declared that as a result of the Catholic Association's temperance and moderation Ireland was in a state of peace and tranquillity 'which she had never before enjoyed',²⁸² and thus there was no need to introduce coercive measures, particularly one which would 'lead ... to insurrection and rebellion'.²⁸³ Politically, there was a great deal of common ground between Burdett and O'Connell. Both had a deep reverence for the British constitution and a fierce loyalty to the monarchy, both advocated free trade and parliamentary reform but opposed the prospect of any change to the social structure of Britain, and both men were socially conservative.

However, the first meeting between Burdett and O'Connell, which took place three days later did not go well. O'Connell remarked to his wife 'there is an English coldness about about him'.²⁸⁴ This was a common perception. On 17 April 1794 Stevens noted in his diary that a friend of his, who had dined with Burdett, 'complained of the Coldness of his Manner'.²⁸⁵ In 1813 Horne Tooke's biographer Alexander Stephens described Burdett as 'rather taciturn'.²⁸⁶ Samuel Bamford made a similar observation on meeting Burdett in 1817, noting that he was 'civilly familiar ... submitting to rather than seeking conversation with men of our class'.²⁸⁷ O'Connell needed men like Burdett to achieve his goal, as he had no other way of making his voice heard in parliament. Consequently, courting Burdett's support and establishing a good working relationship with him was essential. Luckily, he soon

²⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 450.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ Ibid., p. 449.

²⁸² Ibid., p. 456.

²⁸³ Ibid., p. 461.

²⁸⁴ O'Connell, *Correspondence*, Volume III, p. 113. O'Connell to Mary O'Connell, 18 February 1825.

²⁸⁵ *Journal of Bagshaw Stevens*, p. 146.

²⁸⁶ *Memoirs of Horne Tooke*, Volume II, p. 308.

²⁸⁷ Bamford, *Passages*, p. 23.

found that 'Sir Francis Burdett improves much on acquaintance'²⁸⁸ and the two men worked together to promote the Catholic cause. As has been discussed, Burdett consulted O'Connell while formulating the 1825 relief bill. Hobhouse noted in his diary on 9 March 1825, 'Burdett is preparing, in conjunction with O'Connell and Plunket, the Catholic Bill. The greatest harmony reigns between the three'.²⁸⁹ Even after the disappointing defeat in the Lords of the 1825 relief bill O'Connell remained confident in Burdett's abilities. On 4 May 1825 he remarked to his wife that 'Sir Francis is the same manly, *delightful*, honest man on this as on every other occasion'.²⁹⁰ At a Westminster dinner to celebrate the eighteenth anniversary of Burdett's election to the constituency on 23 May 1825 O'Connell declared that 'the name Burdett ... would resound in [Ireland's] green valleys, and along her majestic mountains; it would mingle in their songs of joy, and would not be forgotten in their humble but pious devotions'.²⁹¹

This was not to last. By mid-1826 there was a noticeable shift in their relationship. Although politically there were many similarities between Burdett and O'Connell, personally they were very different, and this caused problems. O'Connell was loud and abrasive, pushy and impatient, a 'swaggerer'.²⁹² He dressed outlandishly and wore a gilt button on his shoulder to signify his leadership of the Emancipation campaign. Burdett viewed such behaviour with distaste. He wanted Emancipation just as much as O'Connell but was willing to bide his time and wait for the most auspicious moment. This involved lengthy negotiation with other MPs, and careful assessment of what would be the best time to introduce an Emancipation bill into the House. The campaign had suffered a setback with the defeat in 1825, so it was important that the next move be planned with care in order to ensure the best possible chances of success. In April 1826, although he presented a petition from Irish Catholics and urged the House to seriously consider the Catholic claims, Burdett did not propose any relief motion in the Commons, claiming the issue had been frequently

²⁸⁸ O'Connell, *Correspondence*, Volume III, p. 117. O'Connell to Mary O'Connell, 21 February 1825.

²⁸⁹ *Broughton's Recollections*, Volume III, p. 93.

²⁹⁰ O'Connell, *Correspondence*, Volume III, p. 161. O'Connell to Mary O'Connell, 4 May 1825. This is a reference to a meeting between O'Connell, Burdett and Lord Donoughmore on 3 May 1825.

²⁹¹ *The Times*, 24 May 1825.

²⁹² Norman, E., *A History of Modern Ireland* (London, 1971), p. 68.

discussed and ‘had so often received the sanction of that House’.²⁹³ It was a wise move. A general election was looming, and in elections seats could be won or lost on controversial issues like Emancipation. Had Burdett pushed the Catholic issue so close to an election it would have forced electoral candidates to declare their position on Emancipation on the hustings, which would have disastrous consequences if the electorate favoured the anti-Catholic candidates. But Burdett’s caution looked to O’Connell and his supporters like a lack of commitment, adding to the impression that he was merely a secondary player in the Emancipation campaign.

By the end of 1826 Burdett had begun to move away from O’Connell, preferring instead to meet and consult with parliamentary supporters of Emancipation in order to carefully plan the next move in the campaign. In December 1826 Hobhouse visited Burdett and found him discussing with Tierney ‘what form the Catholic question ought to be brought on this year’.²⁹⁴ Two months later, in February 1827 Burdett declared in the House his regret at not having the opportunity of discussing Emancipation with Canning, who was absent from the House, remarking that he was ‘desirous, for his guidance in this great question’.²⁹⁵ Burdett also wrote to Huskisson ‘requesting a communication with him on the Catholic Question’²⁹⁶ and spoke of meeting and consulting with ‘friends of the measure’,²⁹⁷ naming Plunket and Lord Lansdowne among them, but not O’Connell. In March 1827 Burdett presented to the Commons his second relief bill. He had originally intended to present the bill on 1 March, but, was asked by the government to postpone it for four days. Burdett was happy to oblige, without hesitation, demonstrating his increasing willingness to cooperate with the post-Liverpool government over Emancipation. In 1825 when Burdett had been asked to postpone his relief bill by seven days²⁹⁸ he initially refused, remarking that ‘on a question of this importance, where the opinions of others were to be taken, he would not take upon himself to decide’.²⁹⁹ He eventually compromised and agreed to postpone the bill by five days but it was with some

²⁹³ *PD*, New Series, Volume XV, p. 566.

²⁹⁴ *Broughton’s Recollections*, Volume III, p. 161.

²⁹⁵ *PD*, New Series, Volume XVI, p. 407-8.

²⁹⁶ BL, Huskisson Papers, Add. MSS 38748, folio 245. Burdett to Huskisson, 25 February 1827.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁸ The request was made because the date Burdett had set coincided with the magistrates’ quarterly sessions, meaning that several MPs would be unable to attend the House.

reluctance and after much consideration.

The widening gulf between Burdett and O'Connell is even more evident in Burdett's presentation of the 1827 bill. In his speech Burdett criticised O'Connell and his tactics, albeit without naming him directly.

He admitted that, of late, many expressions of discontent had been used by those who acted as the Catholic leaders, which he could by no means pretend to justify; but he was sure that when the House recollected how great was the number of Catholics, and how insignificant the number of those who had indulged in such expressions, it would deem it the height of injustice to attribute to the whole body, the blame due to the hasty words spoken by a few individuals in a state of excitement.³⁰⁰

Burdett urged 'Catholic leaders' to teach their followers to 'look, not so much at the wrongs they had suffered, and the injustice they had endured' but to focus on 'the humane relaxation made of late years in the severity of the penal code, by the liberality of English legislation'.³⁰¹ Although Burdett did not believe at this stage that the O'Connellites would turn to radical measures in order to secure Emancipation, and certainly did not think that Irish Catholics would push for separation from Britain, his criticism of the 'Catholic leaders' and their rashness is indicative of his growing concern about O'Connell and his methods. As a result, for the first time in any of his lengthy speeches on Emancipation, Burdett focused on English Catholics and did not speak at length about the virtues of Ireland and the Irish. He described English Catholics as 'among the best and most irreproachable members of the community' and acknowledged that they 'were the worst off',³⁰² as some of the concessions granted to Irish Catholics had not been extended to them. Again referring to the alleged extremism of the Irish Catholic leaders, Burdett asked the House

Were they [the English Catholics] to be cast back, because, forsooth, their brethren in Ireland did not put forth their claims in quite as palatable a form as some of their opponents affected to desire? Were the English Catholics to be compelled to wait until the Irish Catholics

²⁹⁹ *PD*, New Series, Volume XII, p. 1134.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, Volume XVI, p. 844-5.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 845.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 833.

were taught, as it was said, to become more prudent?³⁰³

Burdett's support for the ministries of Canning and Goderich distanced him from O'Connell even further. It was a period of intense activity amongst parliamentary supporters of Emancipation and Burdett remained in the thick of things. He wrote to Hobhouse, 'I find it impossible to leave Town so many persons preferring me to see them'.³⁰⁴ Throughout 1828 Burdett urged the government to grant Emancipation. In May he proposed that the House go into committee to consider the Catholic claims, with a view to coming to 'a final and conciliatory adjustment',³⁰⁵ and in June Burdett brought a Catholic petition before the House, recommending that 'in the next session something would be done to settle this question'.³⁰⁶ Burdett did not propose a relief bill, anticipating that the next one would 'come from the administration', since the question was of a 'kind which belongs to the government to settle'.³⁰⁷ He hoped 'that it will never fall to my unhappy lot to bring it forward again'.³⁰⁸ He was confident that Emancipation would soon be passed, regarding the repeal of the Test and Corporations Act and O'Connell's election to County Clare as significant factors in forcing Wellington, Peel and the King to reconsider their attitude to Emancipation. O'Connell's election coincided with the expiration of the Unlawful Societies Act, which resulted in a revival of the activities of the Catholic Association. In response, Orange Associations increased their own activities, causing unrest and violence. Fearing civil war, politicians turned to Catholic Emancipation as the only way to avoid bloodshed and the King reluctantly agreed. Despite seeing O'Connell's election as a step in the right direction towards the Emancipation act being passed, Burdett continued to show concern over his behaviour, although still without criticising him by name. In January 1829, for example, Burdett wrote to Francis Place that 'the Irish ... always marr their own concerns' with 'their talent & wrongheadedness'.³⁰⁹

In March 1829 three bills were introduced to the House of Commons. The first was to

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 833-4.

³⁰⁴ BL, Broughton Papers, Add. MSS 36464, folio 7. Burdett to J. C. Hobhouse, 1828.

³⁰⁵ *PD*, New Series, Volume XIX, p. 428.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1318.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1322.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 1323.

³⁰⁹ BL, Place Papers, Add. MSS 35148, folio 34. Burdett to Francis Place, 20 January 1829.

suppress O'Connell's Catholic Association, the second to repeal almost all restrictions on Catholics, and the third to increase the qualification for the franchise in Irish counties from forty shillings to ten pounds. Burdett remained central to the campaign. Throughout the month leading Whigs met at Burdett's house to discuss the controversial disenfranchisement bill.³¹⁰ O'Connell had completely turned against it by this point, declaring that it '*must be opposed in every shape and form*'.³¹¹ He petitioned Burdett and the Whigs to vote against the bill in the House. However, his pleas fell on deaf ears and he was disappointed that 'The Opposition, to a man, will vote for it'.³¹² Burdett regarded the freehold wing as the price they had to pay for Emancipation. During debates on the disenfranchisement bill, on 20 March 1829, he remarked 'if they wished to gain an object, they must be ready to give an equivalent for it'.³¹³ He hailed the 1829 Relief Bill as 'the harbinger of peace ... which would make the union a union of heart' and 'the means of strengthening the country within and without'.³¹⁴ In April, despite no-popery demonstrations in London³¹⁵ and anti-Catholic intriguing at Court, the Emancipation bill was passed by a large majority in the Commons and by a majority of just two in the Lords.

IV

In reality, Catholic Emancipation did little to solve Ireland's troubles. Many of the country's economic and social problems remained and more change was needed, particularly to the systems of land tenure and poor relief. When the Whigs gained power in 1830 they were keen to repeal further laws restricting Irish Catholics and introduce measures of relief. Initially, Burdett approved of the Whigs, 'who had fought the battles of the Catholics for half a century, and thereby precluded

³¹⁰ On 6 May 1829 O'Connell wrote that 'the Whigs were in conclave at Sir Francis Burdett's' (O'Connell, *Correspondence*, Volume IV, p. 25. O'Connell to Edward Dyer, 6 March 1829).

³¹¹ *Ibid.*

³¹² *Ibid.*, p. 27. O'Connell to Edward Dyer, 11 March 1829.

³¹³ *PD*, New Series, Volume XX, p. 1375.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1061.

³¹⁵ Burdett criticised these demonstrations and the anti-Catholic petitions that flooded the House, stating that 'There were people at that moment to be found scattering through the country the most violent and inflammatory placards, some of them embellished with prints, for the purpose of enlisting those who were unable to read Every absurdity that the most rancorous mind could invent, was here portrayed, and recourse was had to such base as well as silly means to stimulate the deluded or the unwary into religious conflict' (*Ibid.*, p. 1062).

themselves from the enjoyment of Office'.³¹⁶ He believed that the relief measures they had adopted demonstrated that 'the Administration had determined to correct the evils that had so long been pointed out'.³¹⁷ However, as violence continued in Ireland, the Whigs were compelled to accompany the remedial measures with restrictions, such as the Coercion Act of 1834. Whig apologists argued that this was necessary in order to protect the property of those threatened by the violence in Ireland, without which liberty would be meaningless. But for Irish campaigners, like O'Connell, these measures were proof of the need for more extensive reform in Ireland. On entering parliament in 1830³¹⁸ O'Connell called for parliamentary reform, repeal of the act that disenfranchised the Irish forty-shilling freeholders, and the introduction of a system of poor relief into Ireland. He also attacked the monopoly of the East India Company, Protestant Church Rates in the parishes, jury 'jobbing' in Irish Counties and demanded that every Catholic priest should have an adequate parsonage and glebe. Most significantly he called for the repeal of the Act of Union.³¹⁹ O'Connell used this final demand as an effective political weapon in his negotiations with the Whigs. It was also an idea guaranteed to generate attention.

Burdett continued to show support for Irish Catholics during this period. He backed plans for an increased grant to the Catholic seminary Maynooth College in July 1831 'on the principle that it was politic and wise to afford Catholics an opportunity of being educated at home, instead of compelling them to seek instruction in foreign countries'.³²⁰ Speaking on Irish education in June 1832, Burdett remarked that 'if the system of education was to be national, it was impossible that any difference could be made in favour of one religious persuasion over any other, or all others'.³²¹ For Burdett Irish issues remained important and worthy of parliament's 'full and

³¹⁶ *PD*, 3rd Series, Volume II, p. 336.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, Volume XV, p. 587.

³¹⁸ Under the terms of the Emancipation Act, O'Connell had to stand for re-election in County Clare. His opponents had hoped that the disenfranchisement of the forty-shilling freeholders would prevent his election but he was returned unopposed.

³¹⁹ What O'Connell actually wanted to achieve from repeal of the Union was democracy, tenant rights and the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland. However, his use of the term 'simple repeal' implied the opposite, a return to the pre-1800 system wherein the Protestant domination of Ireland would be restored. This was a tactic deliberately employed to allay British fears of revolution, popery and separation.

³²⁰ *PD*, 3rd Series, Volume V, p. 23.

³²¹ *Ibid.*, Volume XIII, p. 406.

undivided attention'.³²² Burdett's tenuous friendship with O'Connell, however, continued to deteriorate and his concern over the behaviour of O'Connell and his supporters increased. Consequently he began to criticise O'Connell openly in the Commons. In February 1831, for example, Burdett declared that a 'benefit had resulted from the Catholic Relief Bill' as 'Mr. O'Connell could not now agitate Ireland as he had before agitated it',³²³ and criticised the 'Irish agitators' for their rashness, claiming 'in Ireland they had decision first, and discussion afterwards'.³²⁴ He declared the Marquis of Anglesey, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, who had clashed frequently with O'Connell during this period, 'the real Liberator of the Catholics of Ireland'.³²⁵ O'Connell was untroubled by Burdett's criticism, remarking to a friend 'Of what importance is the opinion of poor Burdett to any rational being?'.³²⁶

Burdett's speech in the Commons on reform of the Church of Ireland³²⁷ in February 1833 reveal his mixed feelings about O'Connell during this period. Burdett welcomed the reform as he hoped it would restore to O'Connell 'a calmer comprehension' but then claimed that he felt 'kindly ... towards him'.³²⁸ He also hoped that the reform would 'preserve the Union',³²⁹ which by this time he regarded as 'necessary to the safety, the prosperity, and the grandeur of the empire'.³³⁰ Although opposed to the Union when it was passed in 1800, and continuing to show opposition until the mid-1820s, Burdett did not wish to see the act repealed in the 1830s. His opposition had been based upon the belief that, without any measure of Catholic relief, the Union could have no positive impact on Ireland, it was not because he did not wish to see the Britain and Ireland united. In January 1821 Burdett wrote to Lord Cloncurry that he believed 'there is every reason for union ... between the people of the two countries'.³³¹ Although it had taken almost thirty years, Catholic Emancipation, and the other relief measures adopted in the early 1830s gave Burdett 'the strongest hopes

³²² *Ibid.*, Volume VI, p. 1221.

³²³ *Ibid.*, Volume II, p. 337.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 338.

³²⁶ O'Connell, *Correspondence*, Volume IV, p. 273. O'Connell to Richard Newton Bennett, 13 February 1831.

³²⁷ The reform proposed focused mainly on redistributing church revenues.

³²⁸ *PD*, 3rd Series, Volume XV, p. 586.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 588.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*

³³¹ *Cloncurry's Recollections*, p. 274. Burdett to Lord Cloncurry, 10 January 1821.

that the different parts of the United Kingdom would ... become really united'.³³² He was always against a complete separation between Britain and Ireland, and for this reason was opposed to O'Connell's repeal campaign. In the Commons in February 1831 Burdett had rejected O'Connell's appeals for a repeal of the Union, believing it was not the answer to Ireland's problems and accused O'Connell of encouraging the Irish to support the measure by promising that 'Repeal of the Union would give them food and clothing',³³³ when in reality it would do nothing to alleviate Irish material distress. He also criticised O'Connell for threatening the connection between Britain and Ireland 'with separation and hostility'.³³⁴

Yet, despite Burdett's reservations about O'Connell and the obvious differences between the two men, both maintained a façade of co-operation, as each believed that he needed the other in order to bring an end to Irish distress. While Burdett saw O'Connell as an important tool in securing peace in Ireland and regarded his cooperation as essential for the success of any Irish settlement, Burdett provided O'Connell with a direct channel to the government. Burdett urged Grey to include O'Connell in the government, hoping that this would mollify him and initially Grey was keen to adopt such a course of action. In April 1831 he wrote to Burdett remarking 'Whilst there was yet an opening for conciliation I should have been ever ready to avail myself of it' and complimented O'Connell on his 'previous moderate conduct in Parliament'.³³⁵ However, O'Connell's demands and behaviour made negotiations difficult. In October 1831 Grey assured Burdett that 'Everything has been done, that can be done at present with respect to O'Connell' and stated that any further concession to O'Connell would depend upon 'his conduct which, hitherto, has been very satisfactory'.³³⁶ By early 1832 Grey had grown concerned about O'Connell's increasingly radical behaviour and informed Burdett that it was 'quite impossible for us, as a Government, to have any communication with him'.³³⁷ Burdett continued to encourage Grey to come to some sort of arrangement with

³³² *PD*, 3rd Series, Volume XV, p. 587.

³³³ *Ibid.*, Volume II, p. 337.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 338. In 1837 Burdett described repeal of the Union as 'dismemberment of the empire' and declared that it 'never should be granted' (*The Times*, 10 November 1837).

³³⁵ *Bod.*, Burdett-Coutts Papers, MSS 39454, folio 111. Lord Grey to Burdett, 3 April 1831.

³³⁶ *Ibid.*, folio 127. Lord Grey to Burdett, 22 October 1831.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, folio 111. Lord Grey to Burdett, 3 April 1831.

O'Connell over the next couple of years and continued in his role as mediator between O'Connell and the Whig government. In February 1833 Henry Philpotts, the Bishop of Exeter, in a letter to Wellington on church reform in Ireland, complained of 'the flirting between O'Connell and Mr. Stanley,³³⁸ with Sir F. Burdett as the go-between'.³³⁹ Relations between the government and O'Connell were poor at this stage. In February 1834 a heated exchange took place in the House between the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Lord Althorp, O'Connell and Richard Lalor Sheil, MP for Tipperary. O'Connell and Sheil were angered by rumours that an Irish member had complained to the government that they had threatened to unseat him unless he voted as they directed in the House. Sheil demanded that Althorp name the accuser. Burdett, keen not to take sides on the matter, urged the two men to show restraint and allow the House to consider the matter. The argument, which was aggravated by Althorp's fury at O'Connell's asides to his supporters, continued, forcing Burdett to propose that both Althorp and Sheil be taken into custody.

In April 1834 O'Connell introduced a motion into the House proposing that a Select Committee be appointed to enquire into the effects of the Act of Union on Ireland. In his speech he highlighted the social and economic wrongs that had been inflicted upon Ireland since the Middle Ages. His motion was overwhelmingly defeated. Shortly after, David Roche, MP for Limerick, introduced a resolution concerning Irish Tithes. The Protestant Church of Ireland and the tithes Catholics were required to pay towards its upkeep was a significant grievance among Irish Catholics. Roche's resolution proposed their reduction by twenty per cent and the burden on occupiers by sixty per cent. On 6 May O'Connell added that a share of the fund should be made available to hospitals, infirmaries, dispensaries and Catholic glebes. Burdett supported the measure as it would remove 'what had been so long rankling in the minds of the Irish people' and would make 'that union ... a source of strength and happiness to both countries'.³⁴⁰ He remarked that had the measure been adopted earlier 'all

³³⁸ Stanley was Chief Secretary for Ireland between November 1830 and March 1833.

³³⁹ Brooke, J., and Gandy, J., *The Prime Ministers' Papers: Wellington, Political Correspondence I: 1833-November 1834* (London, 1975), p. 76. The Bishop of Exeter to the Duke of Wellington, 13 February 1833.

³⁴⁰ *PD*, New Series, Volume XXIII, p. 667.

heartburnings and discontent would have been prevented'.³⁴¹ The government rejected the plan but O'Connell was compensated when Lord John Russell announced, without informing his government colleagues, that he agreed in principle with the idea that surpluses from Irish ecclesiastical funds be used for secular purposes. In order to capitalise on its embarrassment, O'Connell assured the government that all calls for Repeal and agitation in Ireland would cease should the tithe plan be adopted. Burdett obviously hoped as much, remarking in the Commons that 'if the questions of tithes was placed on a satisfactory ground to the Irish people' it might 'effect an adjustment of the question of the Union'.³⁴² He also urged the House to take the opportunity for conciliation. O'Connell then demanded an office within the government, preferably as Attorney General or Master of the Rolls. Burdett too encouraged this. On 11 May 1834 Hobhouse noted in his diary that Burdett

told me that he had opened a negotiation between O'Connell and Lord Grey. O'Connell told Burdett that there was now an opportunity of pacifying Ireland; that if Ministers would but adopt his [O'Connell's] Tithe Bill, he would answer for quieting the whole country; and following up a hint given him by Burdett, he confessed his own position to be a disagreeable one, and he would not be unwilling to take office under Lord Grey.³⁴³

Burdett agreed to the plan, believing 'it was scarcely possible to pay too high a price for the pacification of Ireland, which, in his opinion, could only be obtained through O'Connell',³⁴⁴ but negotiations failed after Grey expressed doubts. On 8 May 1834 Grey remarked to Burdett that he 'would spare a limb to pacify Ireland' but that it could not be done 'through the channel which you mention',³⁴⁵ an alliance with O'Connell. Ten days later he declared that 'no advantage could ever be derived from any negotiation with Mr. O'Connell'³⁴⁶ and assured Burdett that he was committed to peace in Ireland, but claimed that this could only be achieved 'by a resolute perseverance in the course hitherto pursued by the Government', which involved 'acting impartially', 'maintaining ... the authority of the government' and

³⁴¹ Ibid.

³⁴² Ibid.

³⁴³ *Broughton's Recollections*, Volume IV, p. 339.

³⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 340.

³⁴⁵ Bod., Burdett-Coutts Papers, MSS 39454, folio 164. Lord Grey to Burdett, 8 May 1834.

‘repressing ... insubordination & violence’.³⁴⁷

In July 1834 Grey resigned as Prime Minister because of his Cabinet’s failure to agree on Irish issues. Melbourne succeeded him briefly but was dismissed by the King in favour of Peel in December. However, by April 1835 Peel was also forced to resign after the failure of his Irish Tithe Bill. The following month, Melbourne accepted the premiership. Under his leadership, the Whigs were more willing to negotiate with O’Connell than they had been under Grey. This resulted in the Lichfield House compact, whereby the Whigs agreed to consult O’Connell over Irish policy and appointments in return for O’Connell’s support in parliament and a promise to suspend his Repeal campaign for the time being. The agreement increased the power of the O’Connellite party, as O’Connell was able to use his position to secure political office for several of his relatives and political supporters. It also encouraged an already over-confident O’Connell. By mid-1835 O’Connell’s vulgarity, arrogance, and the increasingly radical tone of his politics had begun to cause concern in parliamentary circles. His mode of dress became ridiculous as, in his role as ‘the Liberator’, he had taken to wearing a voluminous cloak. He was also extremely malicious and abusive in his attacks on political opponents. In the Commons in May O’Connell insulted William Arden, Lord Alvanley, calling him a ‘bloated buffoon’,³⁴⁸ which resulted in Alvanley demanding O’Connell’s expulsion from the Whig gentleman’s club, Brooks’s. However, many members rallied to O’Connell’s cause and his membership was saved. This resulted in a duel between Alvanley and O’Connell’s eldest son, Morgan. In the autumn of the same year O’Connell promised Alexander Raphael, sheriff of the City of London, that he would secure him a seat at County Carlow for the price of £1000. Raphael was elected but his return was petitioned against so he had to pay O’Connell another £1000 for his defence. The election was disallowed. Annoyed at having nothing to show for his £2000, Raphael revealed all in *The Times*. It was all too much for Burdett. He had tired of O’Connell’s behaviour and condemned Melbourne’s government for their reliance on him in Irish matters. On 21 November 1835 a letter from Burdett to the members of Brooks’s was

³⁴⁶ Ibid., folio 167. Lord Grey to Burdett, 18 May 1834.

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

³⁴⁸ *The Times*, 5 May 1835.

printed in *The Times*. In it he criticised O'Connell for his unacceptable 'language and deportment',³⁴⁹ claiming it reflected badly on other members of the club and recommended O'Connell's expulsion. Once again O'Connell was saved, resulting in the resignation of Burdett and many others from Brooks's. O'Connell responded in a letter 'to the people of Ireland' that implied Burdett was mentally unsound³⁵⁰ and condemned him for the 'an unprovoked and preposterous attack'.³⁵¹ A bitter battle ensued.

In December 1835, in a letter to his Westminster constituents, Burdett outlined his concern over O'Connell's uncouth behaviour and increasingly radical stance towards solving the problems of Ireland, asking 'whether a person, disregarding all the proprieties and decencies, let alone courtesies, of civilised society, ought to be countenanced and sanctioned'.³⁵² Burdett also accused O'Connell of the very thing he himself had often been criticised for: inconsistency. Of O'Connell's 'political principles and opinions' Burdett asked 'if any man can tell me what they are, or, harder still, what they will be a month hence'.³⁵³ O'Connell was a realist who worked on a trial and error basis. His career was peppered with abandoned initiatives. In this way he was actually very similar to Burdett who also often appeared to change tack in order to improve the chances of a certain bill or increase the prominence of a certain cause or campaign. However, Burdett believed that O'Connell's frequent changes of direction were less about courting support and more about feathering his own nest. He poured scorn on O'Connell for calling upon his countrymen to 'mark what he endures for their sakes' and for claiming that 'it is treason to love [Ireland], and death to defend [her]',³⁵⁴ stating

Why, what bragging balderdash, and fustian is all this! what empty, vain, and absurd vaunting, at a time when there is no danger – when, instead of facing danger and death, he quietly and securely pockets 18,000*l.* or 20,000*l.* a year What reality, what risk of any sort or kind, has he ever

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 21 November 1835.

³⁵⁰ O'Connell claimed that Burdett should be placed under 'personal restraint' or risk doing himself 'a mischief' (*Ibid.*, 3 December 1835).

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*

³⁵² *Sir Francis Burdett to the Independent Electors of Westminster* (London, 1835), p. 1-2. This letter was printed in *The Times* on 15 December 1835.

³⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

exposed himself to out of devotion to his “beloved country”?³⁵⁵

In contrast Burdett declared that he had often ‘risked and incurred censure for doing that which I thought was right’.³⁵⁶ O’Connell responded, accusing Burdett of ‘mental imbecility’³⁵⁷ and encouraging the electors of Westminster to dismiss him as their MP. He called Burdett ‘an enemy, who ought to be denounced, a wretched deserter, who ought to be drummed out of our camp’.³⁵⁸ He was an ‘unfortunate’ and ‘faded gentleman now only capable of degrading and injuring the popular cause’.³⁵⁹ Burdett countered by declaring that O’Connell, despite being given the ‘whole credit’ for Catholic Emancipation, had ‘done nothing’³⁶⁰ for Ireland. He claimed that the impact of O’Connell’s policy was having a disastrous economic impact in Ireland:

it depresses all industry, drives from the country that which it stands most in need of - capital, dries up the sources of employment, plucks the heart out of all enterprise, and leaves a miserable superabundant population, without resource, and almost without hope of relief.³⁶¹

He also claimed that Repeal of the Union would cause ‘mischief’³⁶² in Ireland and would weaken and destabilise the empire.

It is clear that by early 1836 Burdett had realised that his plans for Ireland were vastly different from O’Connell’s. Burdett genuinely wanted to bring an end to the violence that had afflicted Ireland for decades, but also to ensure that Ireland remained part of the United Kingdom and that the Protestant ascendancy was preserved. Burdett believed that O’Connell was encouraging violence in Ireland for his own ends: publicity and popularity. This might seem like hypocrisy coming from a man whose actions, particularly during the 1810s, gained him nationwide notoriety. Yet, while Burdett never stood to gain financially from his campaigning, O’Connell depended on public subscriptions for his income. Burdett regularly criticised O’Connell for his

³⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 3.

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

³⁵⁶ Ibid, p.1.

³⁵⁷ *The Times*, 4 January 1836.

³⁵⁸ Ibid.

³⁵⁹ Ibid.

³⁶⁰ Ibid., 22 January 1836.

³⁶¹ Ibid.

³⁶² Ibid.

‘paid-for patriotism’³⁶³ and accused O’Connell of agitating ‘whenever his purse was low’.³⁶⁴ He also condemned the membership fees of the Catholic Association, the Catholic ‘rent’, as being ‘made up of lean morsels being torn from starving mouths’ and ‘exhorted by turbulent, domineering priests’.³⁶⁵ Burdett feared that O’Connell and his followers were taking advantage of Ireland’s troubles to bring about a complete break with Britain and to disestablish the Protestant Church of Ireland. For Burdett

Ireland was *Protestant Ireland* and the Protestants of England and Scotland would never submit to a Roman Catholic ascendancy in that country ... let Mr. Daniel O’Connell say what he would, this great Protestant united country would never bend the neck to a Popish priesthood.³⁶⁶

Burdett’s concerns over the aims of the O’Connellites meant he could not continue to show solidarity with them. The split between Burdett and O’Connell was depicted in prints of the period. In John Doyle’s *Don Quixote attacking the Windmill* (11 December 1835), Burdett is shown as a knight attacking a O’Connell, who is depicted as a windmill, upon whose blades are written ‘Whigs and Radicals’, ‘Repealers’ and ‘Jesuits’.³⁶⁷ Another Doyle print of January 1836, entitled *Don Quixote about to Liberate the Galley Slaves* shows Burdett, again as a knight, about to charge O’Connell, who has chained behind him Melbourne, Russell, Hobhouse and Thomas Spring Rice.³⁶⁸

The break was difficult for Burdett; he had regarded O’Connell’s cooperation as an essential element in the pacification of Ireland and to lose even the limited restraint that he had over him was a huge disappointment. Lord Holland reported that Burdett ‘felt or affected great squeamishness’³⁶⁹ during the House of Commons debates on whether to expel O’Connell for his conduct in November 1835. The break with O’Connell had an enormous impact on the course of Burdett’s later career. For much

³⁶³ *The Times*, 22 January 1836.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 25 April 1838.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 22 January 1836.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 15 May 1837.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, John Johnson Political and Satirical Prints Collection, Political Cartoons 5 (242). See Appendix 5.

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, Political Cartoons 5 (246). See Appendix 6.

of his career, Burdett had been in alliance with the Whig party. However, his disgust at O'Connell's increasingly radical tactics and his disapproval of the Whig government's reliance on him drove a wedge between Burdett and his former allies. This, coupled with his dismay at the failure of Whig policy in Ireland, helped to drive Burdett into the arms of Peel's Conservative party. Peel offered Burdett the best chance of defeating O'Connell's hold over the government. To Burdett's former radical allies this represented a desertion of his principles, Peel had after all fiercely opposed the passage of both Catholic Emancipation and the 1832 Reform Act. For Burdett however, to withhold his support based on Peel's former opposition to these measures would have been self-defeating. He believed that Peel was 'the only man'³⁷⁰ capable of carrying out the reforms necessary for the defence of England's 'great and glorious'³⁷¹ institutions. Besides, Peel had eventually agreed to concede Emancipation in February 1829 when it became clear that continuing to withhold it risked a rebellion in Ireland. At the time Burdett had praised him for this, stating in the Commons that Peel 'was entitled to the support of every honest man' as, whatever his motives, 'he had taken the opportunity of effecting a great public good'.³⁷² Peel had also finally accepted the Reform Act in the 'Tamworth Manifesto' of 1834.

Turning against the Whigs was not a decision Burdett took any pleasure in, nor was it taken lightly. Hobhouse remarked that during the Church Rate debates in May 1837 Burdett talked about 'his own painful position, opposing men for whom he had a great personal esteem'.³⁷³ Burdett also claimed 'his life had been a life of sacrifices, and this was one of them, to which he was prepared to submit'.³⁷⁴ Later that month, Burdett was called upon by a group of his Westminster constituents to resign his seat. The resulting by-election saw Burdett, who was backed by the Tories,³⁷⁵ pitted directly against the Whigs and O'Connellites, who threw themselves behind Burdett's

³⁶⁹ Kriegel, A. D. (Ed), *The Holland House Diaries, 1831-1840* (London, 1977), p. 330.

³⁷⁰ *The Times*, 20 October 1837.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*

³⁷² *PD*, New Series, Volume XX, p. 101.

³⁷³ *Broughton Recollections*, Volume V, p. 72.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁵ Diarist Charles Cavendish Fulke Greville (1794-1865) wrote that 'the Tories worked hard for Burdett' (Reeve, H. (ed), *The Greville Memoirs, A Journal of the Reigns of King George IV, King William IV and Queen Victoria* (8 Vols., London, 1888), Volume III, p. 406).

opponent, John Temple Leader. The election was regarded as a battle between constitutional reform and violent radicalism. In *The Times* on 6 May 1837, it was remarked that Westminster constituents were being asked to decide ‘whether this country shall continue to be a steady, prosperous, and free monarchy; or become a turbulent, levelling and fitful republic’.³⁷⁶ Burdett also regarded the election as a ‘battle of the Constitution’ and claimed his victory would be a ‘glorious triumph’ which would ‘give stability to our glorious institutions’.³⁷⁷ Burdett’s victory at Westminster by a ‘great majority’ was hailed as ‘a great triumph to the Conservative cause’³⁷⁸ and a ‘triumph of liberal and lawful Conservatism’.³⁷⁹ Burdett also regarded it as a ‘triumphant result’,³⁸⁰ but just two months later he resigned his seat and prepared to retire from politics completely, describing his farewell speech to his constituents as ‘the last act of my public life’.³⁸¹ Burdett’s reason for resigning was his ill health, which ‘convinced me how little hope I could indulge of being able to bear the honest attendance of the H[ouse] of C[ommons]’.³⁸² However, after being asked to stand for North Wiltshire, a much less demanding constituency than Westminster, Burdett found himself unable to refuse, remarking that ‘the critical state of the country & my own restoration to health makes me accept the honourable proposal’.³⁸³ He also claimed that should he be elected ‘it will be another triumph & a grand one for the good cause, England against Papist Knaves etc. & though last, not least Ministers’.³⁸⁴

Burdett described his election to North Wiltshire as ‘a new epoch in my life’.³⁸⁵ Certainly it was. Previously, Burdett’s primary concern had been to ‘restore’ the ancient constitution, now his main concern was to protect and defend the constitution from the ‘boldness and ‘rashness’ of the ‘wretchedly imbecile Whig

³⁷⁶ *The Times*, 6 May 1837.

³⁷⁷ Bod., Burdett-Coutts Papers, MSS 39452, folio 82. Burdett to Arthur Merrick, 1 May 1837.

³⁷⁸ Reeve, H. (ed), *The Greville Memoirs, A Journal of the Reigns of King George IV, King William IV and Queen Victoria* (8 Vols., London, 1888), Volume III, p. 406.

³⁷⁹ *The Times*, 12 May 1837.

³⁸⁰ Bod., Burdett-Coutts Papers, MSS 39452, folio 87. Burdett to Arthur Merrick, 13 May 1837.

³⁸¹ Ibid., MSS 39455, folio 55. Burdett to Lady Guildford, 1 July 1837.

³⁸² Ibid.

³⁸³ Ibid., folio 56. Burdett to Lady Guildford, 16 July 1837.

³⁸⁴ Ibid.

³⁸⁵ Ibid., folio 60. Burdett to Lady Guildford, 7 August 1837.

Administration'³⁸⁶ and their O'Connellite allies. In November 1837, concerned at the bribery and corruption being used to secure seats for O'Connellite candidates in Irish elections, Burdett had subscribed to the Spottiswoode Fund. The fund was established to defray the petitioning expenses of non-O'Connellite Irish electoral candidates who 'by the intrigues of the priesthood, and by the bigotry of the peasantry of Ireland, have been for the moment thrust from those seats to which a majority of legitimate voters have elected them'.³⁸⁷ In parliament on 6 December 1837 William Smith O'Brien, MP for Limerick, petitioned the House to complain about the fund and O'Connell criticised Burdett for being involved. Burdett defended himself against the charge of 'criminality',³⁸⁸ stating 'I have acted upon just, upon honest, and upon constitutional grounds'.³⁸⁹ He could not resist criticising O'Connell, whom he labelled 'the greatest conspirator whom I know in the world'.³⁹⁰ Defending his father from Burdett's 'violent attack',³⁹¹ Morgan O'Connell accused Burdett of inconsistency and hypocrisy, remarking that Burdett 'should be the last man in the country to attack any person for pursuing a course of agitation which he had himself pursued so violently and so long'.³⁹² The next day O'Brien brought in a motion for a Select Committee to inquire into the fund.³⁹³ He claimed that 'subscriptions to defeat the returns of Irish Members was a matter of public notoriety'³⁹⁴ and were unconstitutional. He also denied that Irish members owed their seats to 'corruption, to intimidation, or to bribery'.³⁹⁵ Burdett rose to defend himself, claiming the fund was not illegal as it existed to prevent 'an unprincipled combination' from 'bring[ing] men into Parliament who, but for intimidation, would not be there at all'.³⁹⁶ Burdett believed he was 'justified in considering whether some means might not be devised of putting an end to such proceedings'.³⁹⁷ Once again Burdett directed his attack towards O'Connell, whom he accused of 'endeavouring to influence elections by a system of

³⁸⁶ *The Times*, 13 January 1838.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 26 September 1837.

³⁸⁸ *PD*, 3rd Series, Volume XXXIX, p. 699.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 700.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 706.

³⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 706-7.

³⁹³ The House voted against the motion.

³⁹⁴ *PD*, 3rd Series, Volume XXXIX, p. 748.

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 751.

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 787.

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 788.

terrorism'.³⁹⁸ He also claimed that 'a large proportion' of O'Connell's supporters 'were compelled to do so by a system of tyranny'.³⁹⁹ O'Connell responded by calling Burdett 'an old renegade'⁴⁰⁰ and criticising him for allying himself with the Tories, who had been responsible for so many atrocities in Ireland.

Over the next two years Burdett continued to criticise the 'unprincipled', 'dangerous' and 'unholy alliance which notoriously existed between the present Ministers and Popish agitators',⁴⁰¹ at a number of Conservative meetings. At a Conservative dinner held in his honour at Devizes in Wiltshire in September 1837, Burdett objected to the 'pernicious power'⁴⁰² of O'Connell and criticised the Catholic party for using violence and intimidation in order to maintain their positions. He compared the struggle between the opposition and the O'Connellite government as being between 'the same political parties which had divided the nation in 1688',⁴⁰³ 'Protestant' and 'Popish'. In Salford in April 1838 Burdett declared that he was opposed to 'Popery raising its head again under the system of intimidation which was going on in Ireland'.⁴⁰⁴ During the Emancipation debates Burdett had poured scorn on the notion of popish political domination in Ireland, but by the late 1830s it represented to him a real threat, mainly because of the alliance between the government and a 'Popish faction against the sound and rational principles of English freedom and English religion'.⁴⁰⁵ In the early 1820s Burdett felt that he had O'Connell under his control as O'Connell had relied upon him to introduce Catholic relief motions in the House. However, after the passage of Catholic Emancipation O'Connell had his own parliamentary seat and no longer needed Burdett to put forward his ideas in parliament. O'Connell's growing power and influence with the Whig government also concerned Burdett. He wanted religious and political equality for Catholics in Ireland; he regarded O'Connell as wanting more than equality. Emancipation had been granted on the understanding that Catholics would not undermine the Protestant establishment. Burdett believed that it was the intention of the O'Connellites to

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 788.

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 788.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 796.

⁴⁰¹ *The Times*, 28 January 1839.

⁴⁰² *Ibid.*, 21 September 1837.

⁴⁰³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 19 April 1838.

establish a 'Popish ascendancy'⁴⁰⁶ in Ireland by deliberately trying to subvert and destroy the Protestant Church of Ireland. He claimed that the interests of 'Irish demagogues' were 'impossible to reconcile with national security and harmony'.⁴⁰⁷ In the Commons in January 1840 Burdett charged O'Connell with 'exciting in the people the most hostile passions against the lawful authorities and government of the country'.⁴⁰⁸ Yet, despite his concerns, Burdett did not at any stage renounce Emancipation. In April 1838 he reminded the assembled crowd that 'he had always advocated the principle that Roman Catholics should not be excluded on account of their religion from the enjoyment of political rights'⁴⁰⁹ and also declared that he 'did not wish that Protestants should regain that ascendancy which at one time they possessed'.⁴¹⁰ He was however appalled at what he regarded as Catholic ingratitude for the Emancipation Act, which he believed had done 'more than justice'.⁴¹¹ He also reminded Catholics that relief 'was granted, not in consequence of the bullying and blustering of the Roman Catholic Association, but from the magnanimity and generosity of the Protestants of England'.⁴¹²

The O'Connellite threat also prompted Burdett to become more defensive of the Anglican Church towards the end of his life. In May 1837, for example, he defended the Church Rate and criticised the section of the dissenting community that wanted it abolished, remarking 'The Dissenters who possessed property purchased that property with this contingency annexed to it; it was no personal tax - it had nothing whatever to do with religion'.⁴¹³ Hobhouse remarked that in the speech Burdett 'uttered ... High Church and Ultra-Tory sentiments'.⁴¹⁴ This apparent change in Burdett's religious commitment coincided with his move towards Conservatism, which was stimulated by his dissatisfaction with Whig policy, particularly over Ireland. During this period Burdett genuinely believed for the first time that the Church of England was at risk from the O'Connellites, who he believed wanted to undermine it and establish a

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 25 April 1838.

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 23 April 1838.

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 28 January 1839.

⁴⁰⁸ *PD*, 3rd Series, Volume LI, p. 403.

⁴⁰⁹ *The Times*, 25 April 1838.

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 19 April 1838.

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*, 28 January 1839.

⁴¹² *Ibid.*, 25 April 1838.

⁴¹³ *PD*, 3rd Series, Volume XX, p. 962.

Catholic Ascendancy. In May 1837 it was noted that ‘with regard to the correction of church abuses ... Sir FRANCIS BURDETT has on all occasions evinced a disposition to improve and to preserve a sacred institution which it is the object of Popery and Whiggery to destroy’.⁴¹⁵ On 22 May the Irish Metropolitan Conservative Society praised Westminster’s constituents for electing Burdett, ‘a representative who will support the constitutional principles of this Protestant Empire’.⁴¹⁶ Similarly, in December 1837 Burdett was commended for ‘the stand he has recently made in public in defence of the established religion of “the land we live in,” in opposition to the withering doctrines of that foul monster Popery’.⁴¹⁷ However, this was not a change of opinion on Burdett’s part. He always saw the Church of England as an integral part of the constitution and he regarded attacks upon the established Church as part of a wider plan by the O’Connellites and their Whig allies to undermine the constitution of England, hence his determination to defend it. In January 1838, at a Conservative dinner in Derby, Burdett called upon those assembled to unite in support of ‘the institutions and the liberties of the country’,⁴¹⁸ which were under attack from ‘persons in the highest station, members of the House of Commons itself’ who ‘openly professed hostility to the institutions, the laws, and the glorious constitution of old England’.⁴¹⁹ Even in the twilight years of his political career, Burdett remained consistently determined to protect and maintain ‘the glorious fabric of the constitution’.⁴²⁰

V

Burdett’s involvement in Irish politics throughout his career demonstrates a dedication and consistency that has been overlooked in studies of Ireland and in works on Burdett. His involvement in the plots and schemes of Irish revolutionaries between 1796 and 1802 reveal much about the development of Burdett’s early political ideas. This was arguably his most ‘radical’ period and explains why he is perceived as such

⁴¹⁴ *Broughton Recollections*, Volume V, p. 72.

⁴¹⁵ *The Times*, 8 May 1837.

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 22 May 1837.

⁴¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 27 December 1837.

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 13 January 1838.

⁴¹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.*, 25 April 1838.

in some secondary works on the nineteenth century reform movement.⁴²¹ It was Burdett's involvement in such a dangerous cause and his associations with known revolutionaries and men regarded with suspicion by the government that established his reputation as a radical for the next four decades, not the policy he adopted. Burdett's friendship with O'Connor took place at a crucial time in his life. He was young, reckless and passionate. Irish radicalism provided him with the perfect outlet. However, the risks the friendship posed to his wealth, his career and his family relationships ensured that he was far more cautious when dealing with Despard and his associates a few years later. From the early 1800s, Burdett's words and actions regarding Ireland were more measured and his arguments consistent with those of other opposition MPs and moderate Irish politicians. He had learned a lesson from the O'Connor and Despard episodes and realised that gradual change through constitutional channels would provide a better long-term solution for Ireland's problems. Burdett remained committed to Ireland throughout the 1800s and 1810s, and during the 1820s played a leading role in the Catholic Emancipation campaign, placing it at the centre of English politics. Throughout the campaign Burdett demonstrated his moderation, flexibility and pragmatism. He did not at any time advocate any type of physical force; he was willing to work through the established political channels, and make compromises with his own political ideas, in order to push the act through the House. His friendship with O'Connell during this period was based on a mutual dependence, it was not a union based on friendship, which was demonstrated by the bitter breakdown of their relationship in the mid 1830s. The break was to play a significant part in turning Burdett against his former Whig allies and drawing him towards Peel's Conservative party. Ireland played an essential and unique role in the development of Burdett's political career; at the beginning of his career Irish issues directed him to radicalism, at the end of his career, they drew him away from it.

⁴²¹ For further discussion of the perception of Burdett as a radical in secondary works see Chapter 4.

Chapter 2 Appendices

Appendix 1

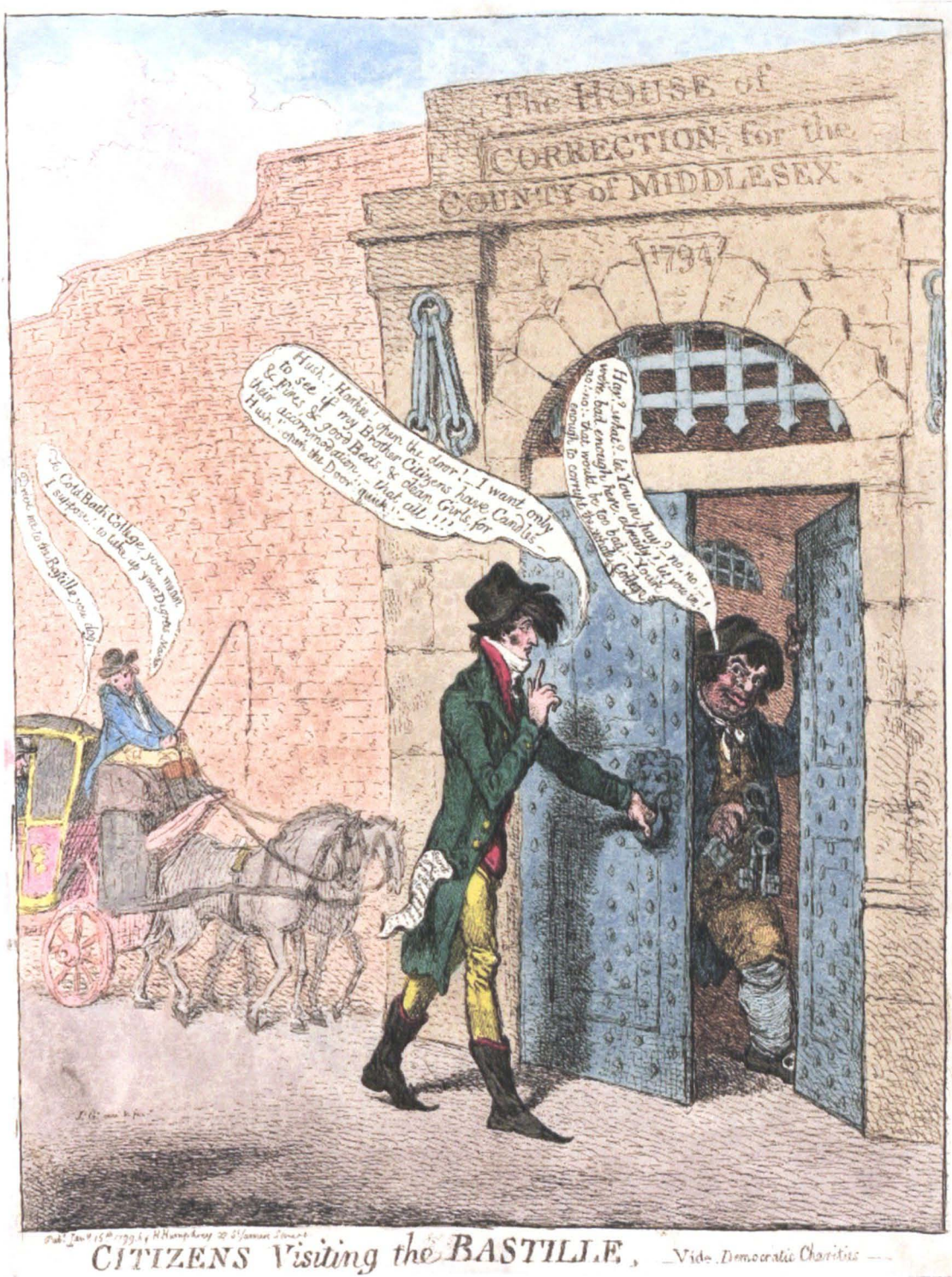
J. Gillray, *French Habits No. 12, Messenger d'Etat*, 21 May 1798



BMS 9213

Appendix 2

J. Gillray, *Citizens visiting the Bastille*, 16 January 1799



BMS 9341

Appendix 3

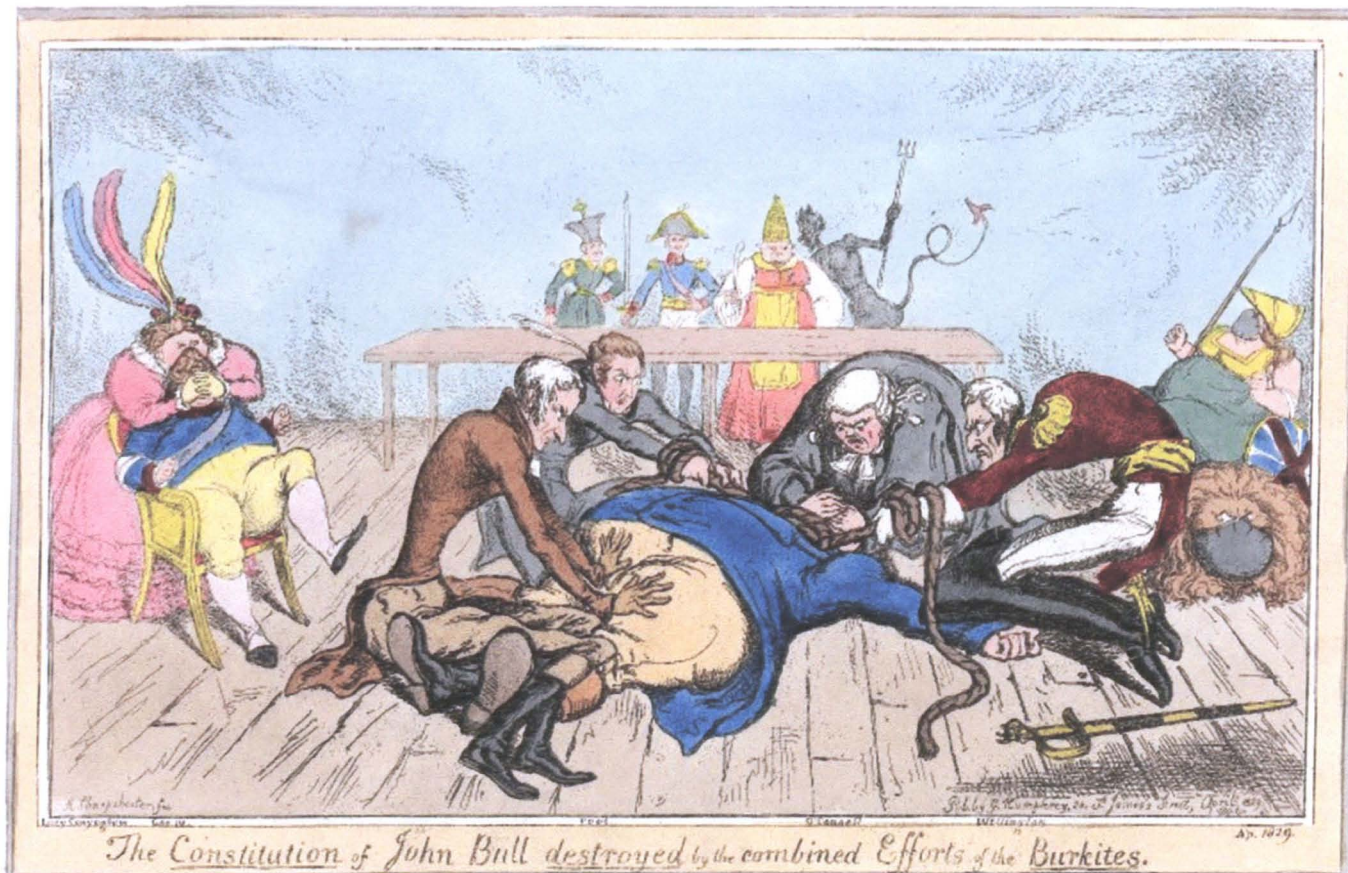
I. Cruikshank, *Defenders of the Faith*, May 1825



BMS 14768

Appendix 4

The CONSTITUTION of John Bull DESTROYED by the Combined Efforts of the BURKITES, 1829



BMS 15708

Appendix 5

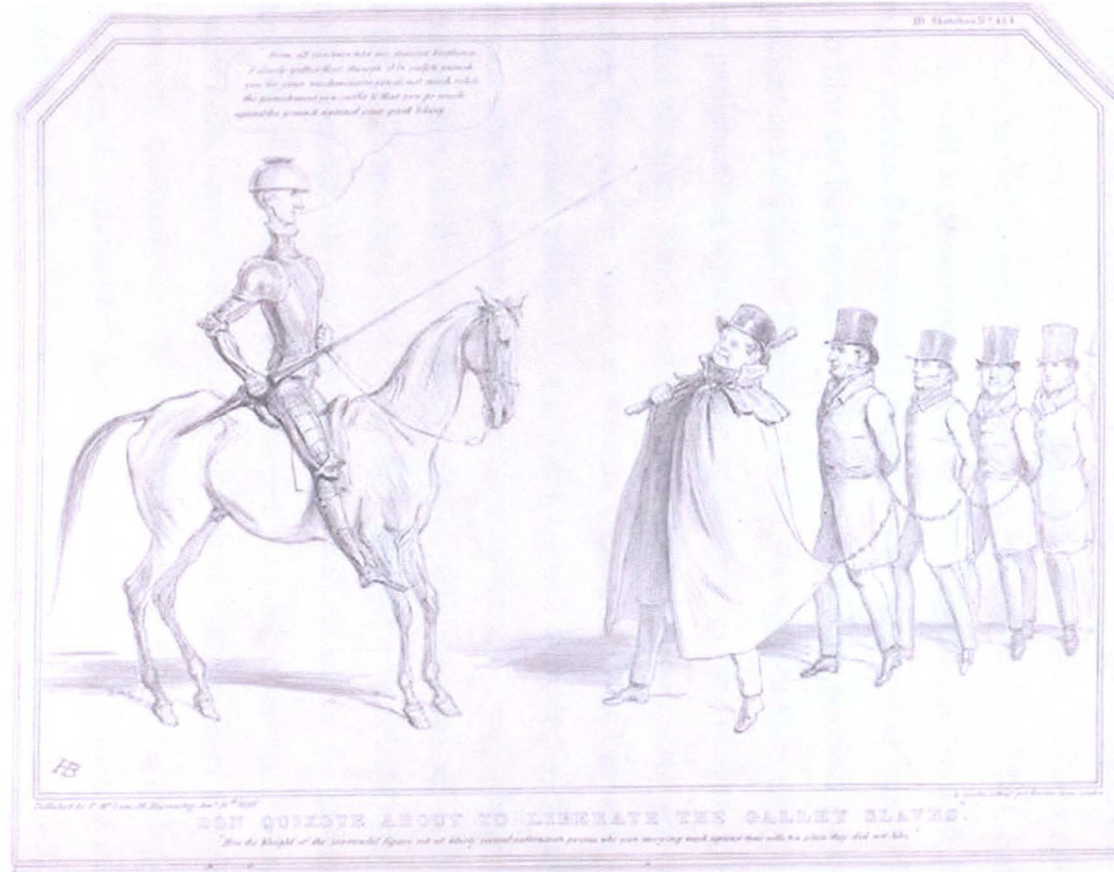
J. Doyle, *Don Quixote attacking the Windmill*, 11 December 1835



Bod., John Johnson Political and Satirical Prints Collection, Political Cartoons 5 (242)

Appendix 6

J. Doyle, *Don Quixote about to Liberate the Galley Slaves*, January 1836



Bod., John Johnson Political and Satirical Prints Collection, Political Cartoons 5 (246)

Chapter 3

Reformer to Reactionary? Burdett and Parliamentary Reform

Burdett is perhaps best known for his involvement in the parliamentary reform campaign and his reputation as a reformer is something that has been the subject of debate amongst historians of the nineteenth-century reform movement.¹ Parliamentary reform was a subject upon which Burdett spoke frequently at public meetings and in the House of Commons. He also introduced four motions relative to parliamentary reform in the House of Commons - in June 1809, May 1817, June 1818 and July 1819 - as well as presenting a large number of petitions from all over the country calling for reform. Parliamentary reform was so important to Burdett because it represented to him the best means of achieving his ultimate political goal, that of restoring the ancient constitution of England. He did not regard reform as a revolution of the current parliamentary system, but a restoration of the ancient system of representation and election, which had been subverted by successive governments since the Glorious Revolution. However, exactly what type of parliamentary reform Burdett favoured is unclear, something for which he was criticised at the time, and one of the reasons why he has been dismissed as a reformer in many histories of the reform movement. Yet, during his lifetime Burdett was regarded as an important figure within the parliamentary reform movement, playing a significant role that has since been underestimated. He occupied a unique position within the movement, in that he linked its parliamentary and extra-parliamentary strands, having close connections with both, and a willingness to work with both in order to achieve his objectives. However, his legacy as a reformer has been marred by his ambiguity over the details of reform, his strained relationship with other key reformers of the period, his apparent abandonment of reform in the 1820s, his acceptance of the 1832 Reform Act, and his alliance with Peel's Conservative Party in his later years.

The first section of this chapter will look at what Burdett wanted to achieve from reform and how it fitted in with his overall desire to restore and defend ancient constitutional liberties. It will establish what type of reform Burdett wanted and the

¹ See Chapter 4, section I.

reasons behind his refusal to commit to specific reforms. The second section will consider the role Burdett played in the parliamentary reform movement from the early 1810s to the 1830s, his association with the radical extra-parliamentary reformers, and how these relationships were affected by his apparent ambiguity over reform and his increasing willingness to cooperate with the parliamentary supporters of reform. It will also look at his response to the Reform Act of 1832 and his attitude towards more extensive parliamentary reform in the 1830s. The third section of this chapter will examine Burdett's reputation as a reformer during his lifetime. It will examine how this was affected by the events of his career, the breakdown of his relationships with the leading radical reformers and his willingness to co-operate with the more moderate parliamentary reformers.

I

Burdett was passionately dedicated to obtaining some measure of parliamentary reform, claiming it was 'the object of my life from its commencement'² and describing himself as 'most sincerely a friend to reform'.³ One of the first votes he cast as an MP was in favour of Grey's Reform Bill of May 1797, which he described as 'a measure that is highly necessary, and one that should be put into a course of trial without delay'.⁴ In the same month Burdett also attended a meeting of supporters of parliamentary reform at the Crown and Anchor Tavern⁵ and continued to attend similar meetings regularly throughout his career, establishing important links with parliamentary and extra-parliamentary reformers. Burdett was a consistent supporter of parliamentary reform and did a great deal to raise its profile, bringing up the subject regularly in the House of Commons, at public meetings, on the hustings and in letters to his constituents. In addition to his four parliamentary motions relative to reform and the numerous pro-reform petitions he presented to the House, Burdett often turned debates in the House on other subjects towards that of parliamentary reform. For example, in December 1802 during the debates on Army Estimates

² *State Trials*, Volume I, p. 41.

³ *CPD*, Volume XIV, p. 248.

⁴ *PR*, Volume II, p. 608.

⁵ See *The Times*, 19 May 1797.

Burdett appealed to the government to give the people 'a better share of *Parliamentary Representation*'⁶ and called for 'a strong parliamentary representation, and a strong *united people*'.⁷ In January 1809, during discussions over aid to the Spanish, Burdett warned that the country, already sinking under the heavy burden of the war, would 'sink lower, if a Reform did not speedily take place'.⁸ In May 1812 during the debates over a motion calling for a change of ministers, Burdett described 'a constitutional reform in the representation of the people' as a 'vital principle'⁹ and proposed an amendment calling for 'a full, fair and free representation of the people, by a Reform in the Commons' House of Parliament'.¹⁰ During discussions over the conduct of ministers in over the Queen's Affair in February 1821, Burdett told the house that 'the question of reform' was so important that 'it so naturally entwined itself with every other subject of great interest'.¹¹ Burdett also used the more sensational episodes of his career to raise the profile of reform. In a letter to his Westminster constituents at the height of the Gale Jones controversy in April 1810, Burdett called for 'a House of Commons freely elected by the people'.¹² In another public letter of February 1820, in response to the proposed Six Acts, Burdett, who was due to stand trial for libel, remarked that 'the constitutional remedy' to corruption was 'a Reform in the Commons House of Parliament'.¹³ At the libel trial itself in March 1820 Burdett spoke at length on reform, claiming it was 'essential to the liberty and the welfare of the people'.¹⁴

Parliamentary reform was so important to Burdett because it formed a central part of his overall political agenda, which was to secure the rights and liberties of the people by restoring the ancient constitution and eradicating corruption. It 'was the only way that the people of England could recover the Constitution which they had lost'.¹⁵ Burdett regarded the right of the people to 'freely choose their representatives for the

⁶ *PR*, 4th Series, Volume I, p. 311.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 312.

⁸ *CPD*, Volume XII, p. 237.

⁹ *PD*, Volume XXIII, p. 255.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 257.

¹¹ *PD*, New Series, Volume IV, p. 460.

¹² *New Annual Register* (London, 1810), p. 56. Letter from Sir Francis Burdett to his constituents, the Electors of Westminster, 20 April 1810.

¹³ Burdett, F., *Address to the Electors of Westminster*, 25 February 1820.

¹⁴ *State Trials*, Volume I, p. 41.

parliament' as 'The root of all our liberties and the foundation of all that is excellent in our Constitution',¹⁶ and claimed that there was 'no security' for essential liberties, such as 'the liberty of the press or trial by jury', without 'a fair representation of the people in parliament'.¹⁷ He believed that 'an uncorrupt, full and fair Representation of the People in this House' was an 'essential',¹⁸ element of the constitution and declared that 'the very spirit of the constitution' depended 'upon a free and pure election, where the choice of the people selected those entrusted with the disposal of their properties and persons'.¹⁹ Thus, in order to protect liberty and the constitution, it was essential to restore and protect that right by promoting parliamentary reform. Reform was crucial, as without it corruption would continue to flourish, which would have a devastating impact on liberty and the constitution, and would endanger the country. Reform was the only measure that offered 'a prospect of relief',²⁰ it was the country's 'sole hope of salvation'.²¹ Burdett firmly believed this, claiming in 1797 that without parliamentary reform 'corruption ... will soon become the euthanasia of our Constitution'.²² Again in 1802 he told Middlesex Freeholders that the country would be 'saved but by one means only – by a fair representation of the people in parliament'.²³ In April 1809 Burdett assured ministers that reform 'would be productive of much good' and warned that 'mischief'²⁴ would occur if they continued to resist it. In parliament in January 1812 Burdett claimed that 'by a constitutional Reformation of the Commons House of Parliament'²⁵ corruption and abuse would be at an end, the people would be reconciled to their government and the independence of the country would be assured. Consequently, 'the safety and stability of the throne'²⁶ would be guaranteed.

As a result of this belief that parliamentary reform was merely a way of securing

¹⁵ *The Morning Chronicle*, 12 September 1816.

¹⁶ *The Times*, 21 February 1811.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 30 December 1817.

¹⁸ *CPD*, Volume XIV, p. 1047.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 952.

²⁰ *Parliamentary Reform*, 1809, p. 7.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

²² *PR*, Volume II, p. 609.

²³ *Memoirs of the Life of Burdett*, p. 13.

²⁴ *CPD*, Volume XIV, p. 248.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, Volume XXI, p. 31.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

ancient rights, Burdett did not regard it as radical or revolutionary. Reform would not change or overthrow the existing political system, it would merely re-establish constitutional liberties already in existence, but which had been subverted by successive monarchs and governments since the Glorious Revolution. In this sense reform was restoration, not innovation. At a reform meeting held at the Crown and Anchor Tavern in May 1809 Burdett spoke at length on this idea, claiming that reform was 'a measure which seeks only to obtain for the people what the law says, has of right immemorial belonged to them',²⁷ and rejected the accusation it was a novel and dangerous innovation, remarking

We want nothing new; we desire no novelties; we wish only to be put back where we were; we are anxious to regain what we have lost, and to have security for the future, that the same encroachments shall not be made again on the liberties and happiness of the people.²⁸

Burdett saw his own reform proposals as measures designed to restore to the people the rights that they had lost, describing his 1809 reform proposal as '*the Constitution itself*'²⁹ and declaring that it was 'simple, constitutional, practicable, and safe, calculated to give satisfaction to the People, to preserve the Rights of the Crown, and to restore the balance of the Constitution'³⁰. Burdett claimed that what he asked for was 'only that which I am entitled to ask by the law and the Constitution. 'Tis our birthright, 'tis our inheritance' and insisted that he proposed 'no new fangled doctrines. I contend for that alone for which our ancestors laid down their lives'.³¹ He denied that supporters of reform were '*innovators* and subverters of the Constitution' and claimed that their wish was '*to rescue this country from the effects of the innovation that has been introduced*'.³²

In order to give his ideas credibility and strengthen his case that reform was restoration rather than innovation, Burdett adopted the same tactics he used in his other political campaigns: appealing from history and placing his own ideas firmly

²⁷ *Parliamentary Reform*, 1809, p. 12.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

²⁹ *CPD*, Volume XIV, p. 1042.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1056.

³¹ *Parliamentary Reform*, 1809, p. 13.

³² *CPD*, Volume XIV, p. 1047.

within the established constitutional framework. In 1812, for example, he argued that Blackstone 'had laid down the right of the people to be fully and fairly represented'.³³ In 1817 he claimed that annual parliaments had been in 'constant practice and usage, for centuries, in this country'³⁴ and traced the history of their use from the Norman invasion, claiming 'the doctrine of annual parliaments ... is as old, and even older, than the time of William the Conqueror'.³⁵ In 1818 he stressed that every proposal he planned to present to the House 'was in strict unison with principles not only professed by our ablest constitutional writers, but recognised even from the throne by every King of England, that had sat upon the throne for the last two hundred years, with the exceptions of Charles the 1st and James the 2nd'.³⁶ At his libel trial in 1820 Burdett quoted a number of authorities who favoured parliamentary reform, including '*Locke, Bolingbroke, Swift, Blackstone, Lord Camden, Lord Chatham, the Duke of Richmond, Mr. Pitt, and Mr. Fox*'.³⁷ This was in order to defend himself against the accusation that he was using parliamentary reform 'as a mask or cover for hostility and mischievousness'.³⁸ However, by referring to these 'men of the first rank and character', these 'brightest talents of the Kingdom',³⁹ Burdett was also insisting that reform itself was legal and constitutional, as well as placing his own ideas within an established and accepted legal and constitutional framework. It was 'too much to talk of Reform as wild and visionary, when it has been supported as such men as I have mentioned, and by such talents as they so eminently possessed'.⁴⁰

Burdett did use the term 'radical reform',⁴¹ but by it he meant comprehensive reform of the electoral system, enacted by a single parliamentary measure. He did not regard 'radical reform' as a complete overthrow of the governmental system, nor did he want to change the fundamental structure of parliament or the fabric of the constitution. He wanted 'an effectual, essential, constitutional reform of the House of Commons, to

³³ *PD*, Volume XXIII, p. 144.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, Volume XXXVI, p. 707.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *PD*, Volume XXXVIII, p. 1119.

³⁷ *State Trials*, Volume I, p. 41.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *The Times*, 10 March 1820.

guard against misrepresentation of the people ... that would root out corruption'.⁴² Burdett never advocated any reform of the House of Lords, claiming 'such a thing was never dreamt of',⁴³ and, as has been established, was a firm supporter of the monarchy.⁴⁴ He wanted a 'complete Reform',⁴⁵ which would restore 'the undoubted right of the people, namely, a fair and full representation in the Commons House of Parliament'.⁴⁶ It was for this reason that Burdett was critical of some of the piecemeal reform measures advocated by Whig reformers, believing that these 'small changes and trifling reforms ... would be of very little service'.⁴⁷ For example, Burdett commended Whitbread's motion of June 1809, that the House consider further limiting the number of placemen and pensioners able to sit in the House, but described it as 'only palliative, capable of producing good as far as it went'.⁴⁸ He also feared that it would 'mislead the public judgement, or divert it from the only redress adequate to the evil, namely a Reform in the Representation of the People'.⁴⁹ Burdett voted against Curwen's Reform Bill, which aimed at preventing the sale of seats in parliament, on similar grounds, describing the measure as merely a 'partial Reformation',⁵⁰ which would 'relieve the country for a moment' but 'eventually we should not be a jot better'.⁵¹ Thus it 'would not effectuate any good or beneficial purpose'.⁵² He commended Curwen himself, as 'he was fully convinced that the hon. gent. who brought in the bill, expected that great public advantage would result from it',⁵³ but he could not bring himself to support it, believing that 'like all sham measures', the bill 'would be inefficient',⁵⁴ as it would do little to regulate corruption and would merely make it more difficult to detect. However, Burdett was willing to support more limited reform measures that he believed would be effective and that

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 11 May 1837. Burdett made this remark in response to accusations that he had supported such a reform. He told the Westminster electors that the claims were 'not correct' (ibid). In September 1823 Burdett also rejected the idea of reforming the Lords, remarking at a public dinner that reformers 'sought not to invade those privileges of the Peers' (Ibid., 26 September 1823).

⁴⁴ See Chapter 1, section I.

⁴⁵ *Parliamentary Reform*, 1809, p. 11.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ *The Times*, 10 March 1820.

⁴⁸ *CPD*, Volume XIV, p. 952.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ *Parliamentary Reform*, 1809, p. 10.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² *CPD*, Volume XIV, p. 733.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 730.

were consistent with his overall aims. In April 1808, for example, he was happy to support the Offices in Reversion Bill, which proposed abolishing the practice of granting offices in reversion, claiming it was 'a commencement of reform, it acknowledged the principle - the necessity; and therefore, he should vote for it'.⁵⁵ He supported Brand's Reform Bill in May 1812,⁵⁶ which proposed extending the vote in the counties to copyholders, on the grounds that 'any amelioration of the representation of the people would be something gained for the general interests of the country'.⁵⁷ Also, in April 1822 and April 1826 Burdett voted in favour of Lord John Russell's motions to disenfranchise small boroughs with less than 500 voters and redistribute their seats amongst the counties and larger unrepresented towns.⁵⁸

Although it is clear what Burdett wanted to achieve from parliamentary reform - a parliament free from corruption, which in turn would secure the liberties of the people and the safety of the country - his precise intentions with regard to the particulars of reform are unclear and Burdett himself was often vague on the subject. Although he frequently spoke of extending the franchise in order to ensure 'a full and fair representation of the people'⁵⁹ and advocated more shorter parliaments, Burdett was rarely specific about to whom he wanted to extend the franchise or how much he wanted to reduce the life of a parliament. In addition, each of the motions he presented to the House of Commons has a different emphasis with regard to the type of reform it advocated. This ambiguity on the subject of reform began at the very beginning of Burdett's parliamentary career when he spoke on Grey's Reform Bill in May 1797. Although definite in his support for the bill, Burdett did not go into any

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 729-30.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, Volume XI, p. 28.

⁵⁶ Brand had submitted a reform motion before the Commons in May 1810 but Burdett was unable to speak or vote on the measure as he was in prison at the time.

⁵⁷ *PD*, Volume XXIII, p. 148.

⁵⁸ See *PD*, New Series, Volumes VII, p. 141-2 and XV, p. 714.

⁵⁹ Burdett used this exact phrase twice in June 1809 (*CPD*, Volume XIV, p. 951 and p. 1047). He regularly used this, or similar terms, throughout his career in order to call for parliamentary reform. In 1797 Burdett called for a 'full and free representation of the people' (*PR*, 3rd Series, Volume II, p. 609). Again in 1798 he called upon the King to unite his people and secure liberty by 'a full, free, and fair representation of the People in Parliament' (*Ibid.*, Volume VII, p. 50). Similarly, in January 1812 he spoke of his desire for 'a real representation of the people in the Commons' House of Parliament' and 'a reform of the representation of that House' (*CPD*, Volume XXI, p. 30), while in May 1812 he proposed an amendment to a motion calling for a change of ministers, calling instead for 'a full, fair and free representation of the people, by a Reform in the Commons' House of Parliament' (*CPD*,

detail over the specific measures of reform he personally advocated, remarking only 'with respect to universal suffrage, that is a point which may be discussed hereafter'.⁶⁰ Burdett's first reform proposal, presented to the Commons in June 1809, was a little clearer in establishing his intentions with regard to reform. Burdett promised he would 'state to this house, and to the public, definitely and precisely, what my views are upon the subject' so that 'it may be fully and clearly understood, how far I do really mean to go and at what point I mean to stop'.⁶¹ Certainly, his speech was more precise over specific reform proposals, advocating taxpayer suffrage, single member constituencies and the return of parliaments to a 'Constitutional Duration'.⁶² However, the motion itself called merely for the House to promise to consider reform in the next parliamentary session and Burdett never clearly defined what he meant by 'Constitutional Duration'. Burdett's next reform motion, presented to the House in May 1817, was particularly vague. As in 1809, the motion itself was not aimed at enacting any specific reform, it was merely to 'induce the House to institute an inquiry into the subject'.⁶³ In his speech Burdett focused primarily on the necessity of reform and did not advocate any specific proposals, except that of annual parliaments. Burdett's proposal of June 1818 is by far the most detailed in terms of the specific reforms it outlines. It is also the only one of Burdett's reform motions that calls for the House to commit to reform rather than just consider the question. After a lengthy speech on the necessity and justice of reform, Burdett read out a series of twenty-six resolutions, the last of which was that the House would commit to 'establish a comprehensive and consistent plan of reform; in virtue whereof, the whole people of the United Kingdom, may be fairly and truly represented in this House'.⁶⁴ He then went on to propose a number of specific reform measures, including universal suffrage, annual parliaments, equal electoral districts, single member constituencies, single day elections and the ballot. However, it should be noted that this proposal was drafted as part of a brief union between Burdett and Jeremy Bentham, and consequently would have reflected the ideas of both men. The following year, Burdett

Volume XXIII, p. 257).

⁶⁰ *PR*, 3rd Series, Volume II, p. 610.

⁶¹ *CPD*, Volume XIV, p. 1041.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 1053.

⁶³ *PD*, Volume XXXVI, p. 724.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, Volume XXXVIII, p. 1148.

returned to advocating no specific reform proposals, claiming in July 1819 that his intention in introducing a motion relative to reform was only 'to exhibit the state of the nation and its grievances, and their connexion with the corrupt state of this House'.⁶⁵ On this occasion, Burdett spent some time discussing the viability of universal suffrage but focused primarily on the 'public burthens and distress', which he claimed were caused by 'the want of a fair representation of the people in parliament'.⁶⁶

Burdett was no clearer with regard to his opinions on the particulars of reform on the hustings or at public meetings, where he regularly refused to commit himself to specific reform measures. At a meeting at the Crown and Anchor Tavern in May 1809, just weeks before the presentation of his first reform proposal to the House of Commons, Burdett spoke at length on the necessity of parliamentary reform but did not advocate any particular reform measures. At another reform meeting, in Westminster on 23 March 1818, at which it was resolved that all reform petitions presented to the House should be modelled on annual parliaments and universal suffrage, Burdett, who chaired the meeting, did not at any stage confirm his support for these measures, despite being called upon to do so by Major Cartwright. Instead he remarked,

it was not necessary to be supposed that he acquiesced in them. No professions of faith were necessary on his part He certainly never would express his assent to any proposition in circumstances which could excite a surmise that it was not a voluntary assent. He would only say, that he should always adopt that course which appeared to him most judicious and most likely to be effectual.⁶⁷

At a Westminster Meeting held in September 1819 Burdett agreed to the resolution that liberty could only be protected 'by making the elective franchise so equal, so extensive, and so secure, that it shall be impossible to corrupt the electors; and the duration of Parliament so short that it shall be the interest of the representative to act

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, Volume XL, p. 1463.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1442.

⁶⁷ *The Times*, 24 March 1818.

faithfully towards his constituents',⁶⁸ but did not make any comment on specific reform proposals in his speech, instead focusing on his outrage at the Peterloo Massacre. At another Westminster meeting held in December 1819 Burdett, 'without specifying any particular plan for a reform in the representation of the people', claimed 'that some effectual reform was necessary'.⁶⁹ He was similarly vague at a meeting in March 1820 when he claimed 'it was quite absurd to call for a statement of the precise extent to which reform should go'.⁷⁰ It would appear from such statements that Burdett himself was unsure about the type of reform he wanted. However, a more detailed examination of his four reform proposals, and Burdett's other speeches on the subject of reform, reveal a clearer picture of his reform intentions. It is also revealing of the reasons for his ambiguity over the issue.

Reducing the duration of parliaments was one of Burdett's primary aims with regards to parliamentary reform. He believed that more frequent elections would strengthen the link between an MP and his constituents, thus increasing accountability and reducing corruption. Burdett regarded long parliaments as the means by which unpopular governments survived and were able to pass unpopular measures, often contrary to the wishes of the people and damaging to liberty. Employing his usual method of argument, historical example, Burdett noted that Henry VIII continued the Reformation Parliament for five years because he wanted to 'carry measures which were not in conformity with the sentiments of the great bulk of the people - which were not supported by the generality of the nation, but by a party of the nation'.⁷¹ However, more importantly, Burdett believed that shorter parliaments, specifically annual parliaments, were a central part of the ancient constitution, and were thus essential in terms of protecting liberty; 'the whole frame of the constitution depended on having frequent parliaments'.⁷² Burdett claimed that annual parliaments were 'the ancient undoubted right of the people',⁷³ and 'Their birth right'.⁷⁴ They were part of

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 3 September 1819.

⁶⁹ *The Liverpool Mercury*, 17 December 1819.

⁷⁰ *The Times*, 10 March 1820.

⁷¹ *PD*, Volume XXXVI, p. 709.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 708.

⁷³ *CPD*, Volume XI, p. 28.

⁷⁴ *Bod.*, Burdett-Coutts Papers, MSS 39467, folio 52. This document is undated.

‘ancient practice’, evidence of which could be maintained from ‘ancient records’.⁷⁵ He believed that it was both custom and the legal practice to have frequent parliaments, claiming ‘the laws of Edward 3rd declared parliaments to be annual’⁷⁶ and also remarking ‘from the earliest time down to the 23^d of Henry 6th, our ancestors were in the constant habit of having parliaments twice and three times in the course of a year’.⁷⁷ The argument is similar to that put forward by Bolingbroke in his *Dissertation Upon Parties* (1735), wherein it is argued that ‘the security of our liberty’ consisted in ‘frequent new parliaments’⁷⁸ and that ‘the frequent elections of parliament are as much an essential part of this system, as the frequent sittings of parliament’.⁷⁹

Extending the franchise was another essential element of reform for Burdett. He certainly favoured an increased electorate, believing that a larger electorate would be more likely to vote according to their conscience, not according to which party paid the most for their vote. His own experiences at Westminster, which had one of the largest electorates in the country and also a reputation for returning radical members,⁸⁰ demonstrated the independence that could arise from a large number of voters. He often complained about how the limited electorate meant that a relatively small group of men could control the House by buying votes and act without any consideration of the interests of the people. In May 1809, for example, he remarked that ‘too much of the representation was engrossed by the power of a few’.⁸¹ A month later, while presenting his reform proposal to the Commons, Burdett claimed that the people ‘are not fairly, nor indeed at all represented’.⁸² In February 1820 Burdett complained that the country was governed by ‘a Boroughmonger Oligarchy’ who were ‘unchecked by the voice, uninfluenced by the will, and regardless of the wishes of the nation’.⁸³ In theory Burdett was in favour of the most extensive

⁷⁵ *The Times*, 11 March 1818.

⁷⁶ *PD*, Volume XXXVI, p. 708.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 709.

⁷⁸ *A Dissertation Upon Parties* (1735), Letter XI. Bolingbroke, *Works II*, Volume III, p. 180.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

⁸⁰ Westminster had approximately 12,000 voters (Thorne, R. G., *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1790-1820* (5 Vols., London, 1986), Volume II, p. 266).

⁸¹ *Parliamentary Reform*, 1809, p. 6.

⁸² *CPD*, Volume XIV, p. 1050.

⁸³ Burdett, F., *Address to the Electors of Westminster*, 25 February 1820.

electoral franchise, universal manhood suffrage, believing that 'the right of suffrage ought to be extended to the great bulk of the commonality of the realm'.⁸⁴ He supported the measure on several occasions. In early 1817 Burdett met with a small group of reformers at his London home, where he discussed with them 'some points of the intended Bill for Reform, candidly and freely; and concluded with promising to support universal suffrage'.⁸⁵ In his 1818 reform proposal Burdett spoke in favour of universal suffrage, remarking that he believed that 'suffrage should be equal and comprehensive'⁸⁶ and also claiming that he was convinced 'of the necessity, as well as of the safety of the most extended system of reform'.⁸⁷ When speaking on Burdett's 1818 reform bill, Thomas Cochrane, Westminster's second member, claimed that Burdett's 'conversion to the doctrine of universal suffrage ... was but of recent date', to which Burdett 'intimated his dissent'.⁸⁸ In July 1830, at a meeting of the friends of parliamentary reform, Burdett declared his support for 'the fullest reform in the system of representation' and claimed that 'till annual parliaments and universal suffrage were adopted there could not be a complete reform'.⁸⁹

However, Burdett had reservations about the practicality of universal suffrage, and the likelihood of it actually being achieved in his lifetime. In his early career Burdett 'spoke of universal suffrage as a subject for future consideration'.⁹⁰ In 1817 he told the Manchester radical Samuel Bamford that 'he was not sanguine of much co-operation in the house'.⁹¹ As a result Burdett encouraged reformers to petition for taxpayer or householder suffrage, seeing it as having a better chance of being accepted by parliament. His own 1809 reform proposal called for taxpayer suffrage and in January 1817 he encouraged members of the Hampden Club to adopt a resolution to petition for reform based on householder rather than universal suffrage. As well as the problems of getting universal suffrage accepted by parliament, Burdett also had concerns over granting the vote to the uneducated masses, who could be

⁸⁴ *The Times*, 24 February 1817.

⁸⁵ Bamford, *Passages*, p. 23-4.

⁸⁶ *PD*, Volume XXXVIII, p. 1133.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1122.

⁸⁸ *PD*, Volume XXXVIII, p. 1152.

⁸⁹ *The Times*, 17 July 1830.

⁹⁰ Cooke, G. W., *The History of Party: from the rise of the Whig and Tory factions in the reign of Charles II to the passing of the Reform Bill, Volume III, 1762-1832*, London, 1837, p. 447.

easily bribed or manipulated. For this reason, Burdett was a firm supporter of the Mechanics Institutes, establishments which provided educational facilities for working men. The London Mechanics Institute was founded in 1823, and Burdett wrote to Place that was keen to offer 'every assistance in my power ... either in purse or person, which you may be able to point out for its benefit', claiming that 'It appears to me to offer more advantage, of every kind, than any scheme yet suggested for the people at large'.⁹² Burdett donated £1,000 to the Institute and also a large number of books.⁹³ He was fully committed to the project, writing to Place in January 1825, 'The Institution I consider as holding out the prospect of the greatest benefit to the people, the working people, of anything that has been hit upon to this time. I have it therefore much at heart'.⁹⁴ Burdett's 1818 reform proposal is most revealing of all with regards to his opinions about the practicality of universal suffrage and the likelihood it being achieved. Burdett clearly outlined his support for 'extending and equalising the right of suffrage',⁹⁵ but recognised that 'it is clear that some defalcation from it was, in practice necessary'⁹⁶ and acknowledged that 'some line must be drawn ... many were the points at which the limits might be fixed'.⁹⁷ Thus, for Burdett universal suffrage represented an ideal. It was something to work towards, not necessarily something that could be achieved in the here and now. As has been argued by Dinwiddy, Burdett simply did not see universal suffrage as an immediately practical and realistic goal, and objected to reformers who saw it as essential and refused to accept reform on any other terms.⁹⁸ In July 1830 he remarked that as a 'practical man of the world' he was willing to 'accept the co-operation of those who might not be disposed to go as far as he would', hoping that 'time and experience would induce them to come round to his more extended views as their soundness and benefits should unfold themselves'.⁹⁹ Burdett was a pragmatist and was willing to accept whatever the government offered in terms of reform, so long as it was

⁹¹ Bamford, *Passages*, p. 23-4.

⁹² BL, Place Papers, Add MSS 27823, folio 333. Burdett to Francis Place, 27 April 1824.

⁹³ See BL, Place Papers, Add MSS 27823, folio 333. Burdett to Francis Place, 27 April 1824, and folio 340; and *ibid.*, Add MSS 35150, folio 124. Burdett to Place, 2 March 1832.

⁹⁴ BL, Place Papers, Add MSS 27823, folio 343. Burdett to Francis Place, 16 January 1825.

⁹⁵ *PD*, Volume XXXVIII, p. 1134.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1122.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ See Dinwiddy, J. R., 'Sir Francis Burdett and Burdettite Radicalism', *History* 65 (1980).

⁹⁹ *The Times*, 17 July 1830.

consistent with his long term goal of eradicating corruption and making members more accountable to their constituents. Tax-payer suffrage represented to Burdett a compromise. It would extend the franchise enough to significantly reduce corruption but was also moderate enough appeal to parliamentarians who feared 'radical' reform. In March 1820 Burdett declared that 'he cared not where the line was drawn, provided a real and substantial reform was effected' and remarked that he believed a more limited franchise than universal suffrage 'would constitute a complete, effectual and radical reform'.¹⁰⁰

Another important point of reform under discussion at the time was the secret ballot. Some reformers saw the secret ballot as essential, believing it to be an integral part of any reform proposal. Burdett was not convinced. Differences over the issue marred the Burdett-Bentham reform proposal of 1818, with Bentham declaring that the secret ballot was 'a fundamental'¹⁰¹ and refusing to put his name to any proposal that did not include it, while Burdett described the secret ballot as 'useless' and even claimed that it could damage the prospects of reform 'because of the prejudice to be surmounted'.¹⁰² Burdett was not opposed to the secret ballot, claiming in 1835 that he had 'supported it both by speech and vote. I always thought it a convenient, orderly, and easy way of taking votes',¹⁰³ but felt that it would be unnecessary in a reformed system as a broader franchise and annual parliaments would mean that 'the numbers would be too great to corrupt and the benefit to be derived would be too small'.¹⁰⁴ Burdett believed that the secret ballot 'was only necessary when the general system was corrupt, and that when the right of representation was placed on the broad basis he should like to see it rest on, there would be no need of the ballot'.¹⁰⁵ Other popular particulars of reform at the time were equal electoral districts and single day elections. As with the secret ballot, Burdett was not opposed to such measures, and certainly supported the abolition of rotten boroughs and the redistribution of seats to the growing towns, criticising the House in February 1830 for their refusal to

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 10 March 1820.

¹⁰¹ *Bentham's Correspondence*, Volume 9, p. 177-8. Bentham to Burdett, 10 March 1818.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 179.

¹⁰³ *Sir Francis Burdett to the Independent Electors of Westminster, November 1835.*

¹⁰⁴ *PD*, Volume XXXVIII, p. 1134.

¹⁰⁵ *The Times*, 17 July 1830.

disenfranchise East Retford and enfranchise Birmingham, but he believed that these problems would be solved by a reform involving annual parliaments and extending the franchise and so they did not feature prominently in any of his pro-reform arguments. For example, in 1830 he remarked that 'the representation of all our large towns was so absurd in practice, and formed such an anomaly in our Constitution, that the whole system deserved to be revised'.¹⁰⁶

That Burdett wanted some measure of parliamentary reform is clear. His failure to commit to specific reforms was deliberate. Burdett was a practical man. With reform, as with his other political campaigns, he had a fixed final goal in mind, but was willing to compromise in order to achieve it. Burdett wanted a measure of reform that would ensure the elimination of corruption in parliament and would thus restore and secure constitutional rights and liberties. Ideally this reform would involve universal suffrage and annual parliaments. However, in practical terms these were unlikely to be granted as so many parliamentarians were against such 'radical' measures. Consequently, Burdett was willing to support more limited reform if he believed it would be effective and if it was consistent with his overall aim of reducing corruption and restoring to the people their rights and liberties. In May 1812 he claimed

He was certainly one of those persons who would not be satisfied with what was generally called moderate reform, but who went the whole length of wishing to see the people possessed of that share in the government to which the constitution and law entitled them. At the same time he was not one of those captious reformists that would take nothing, if they could not get every thing they wished for. Any measure whatsoever, which appeared to him a reformation of abuses, or an amelioration of the present state of the representation, however short such reform might come of his wishes, should always meet with his most cordial support.¹⁰⁷

Brand's Reform Bill fitted in with this as, like Burdett, Brand wanted to 'destroy a dangerous and prevalent oligarchy' and 'restore the constitution to its former state'.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ *PD*, New Series, Volume XXII, p. 710.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, Volume XXIII, p. 146-7.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

He also favoured an extended franchise and a reduction in the life of parliaments. Curwen's Reform Bill, however, although aimed at reducing corruption, did not address what Burdett regarded as the root of the problem - the state of the representation and the length of parliaments - and therefore he could not support it. Burdett was willing to support reform 'short of what he might think right' as he realised that 'something must be sacrificed to the opinions or even the prejudices of others'¹⁰⁹ in order to achieve 'the great object...the advantages of practical reform'.¹¹⁰ Consequently, Burdett's own reform proposals, were carefully moderated, calling largely for a consideration of the question of reform rather than proposing specific measures of reform, in order to generate debate on the issue, to bring reform to the political forefront and to attract the maximum amount of support.

Burdett realised that the only way that any reform could be achieved was through co-operation between the moderate parliamentary and radical extra-parliamentary supporters of reform. It was essential that these two forces unite if a reform bill was to have any chance of success, but in order to do this, they would have to compromise with one another. The radical elements would have to be moderated, the more reactionary elements cajoled. In June 1820 Burdett declared that

It was high time little jealousies and little differences in political opinions should be abandoned, and that all who entertained good intentions towards the public good should concur and agree together

If they did not act by common agreement, they must look for common failure.¹¹¹

In the 1810s, Burdett walked a tightrope between the two reform groups, carefully trying to please both sides but all the while keeping an eye upon his own goal. It was a difficult position, which Burdett himself recognised, remarking to Lady Burdett in 1810 that an address he had written to the Middlesex Freeholders on the subject of reform was 'so gentle, that I hope it will please the most timid at the same time it is strong in principle'.¹¹² However, Burdett's ambiguity over reform and his willingness

¹⁰⁹ *The Times*, 19 August 1818.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 5 June 1820.

¹¹² *Bod.*, Burdett-Coutts Papers, MSS 39464, folio 5. Burdett to Lady Burdett, 1810.

to co-operate with the more moderate parliamentary reformers undermined his relationships with the radical extra-parliamentary reformers, which eventually resulted in a breakdown of co-operation in the late 1810s.

II

Throughout the 1810s Burdett formed close working relationships with the extra-parliamentary reformers Major John Cartwright, William Cobbett and Henry ‘Orator’ Hunt, believing that collaboration was the best means of achieving reform. Cartwright, Cobbett and Hunt all praised Burdett for his efforts in the cause of reform and were keen to work with him. The four men met regularly between 1810 and 1812 at the ‘very delightful and rational parties’¹¹³ held by Cobbett in his prison apartments at Newgate. Hunt wrote of the ‘frequent efforts’ made by ‘Major Cartwright, Sir F. Burdett, Mr. Cobbett, myself’¹¹⁴ to raise the profile of reform in the 1810s. Cartwright and Burdett shared a common goal, that of ‘restoring the constitution’,¹¹⁵ and Cartwright saw Burdett as the ideal candidate to represent reformers in the Commons because he was a wealthy, and therefore independent, gentleman with radical views. He regarded a man in such a position ‘who is truly a friend to the democratic part of our constitution’ as ‘a treasure indeed!’¹¹⁶ In 1804 Cartwright established the Middlesex Freeholders Club in order to support Burdett’s election to the constituency, and in November 1806 he declared that he would ‘assist’ Burdett ‘to the utmost of my power’ in the contest for Middlesex.¹¹⁷ The two men worked together on Burdett’s 1809 reform proposal, with Cartwright describing the plan as ‘excellent’,¹¹⁸ and they were also both leading members of the Hampden Club. Burdett had a great deal of respect for the old Major, describing him as ‘his friend’¹¹⁹ and regularly complimenting Cartwright for his long and dedicated service to the cause of liberty. Cobbett, despite having some early reservations about

¹¹³ Hunt, *Memoirs*, Volume III, p. 25.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Volume I, p. vi.

¹¹⁵ Cartwright, *Life*, Volume I, p. 399. Cartwright to Samuel Whitbread, 25 March 1810.

¹¹⁶ Cartwright, J., *The Comparison in which Mock-Reform, Half-Reform, and Constitutional Reform are Considered, or, Who are the Enlightened and Practical Statesmen of Talent and Integrity to Preserve our Laws and Liberties? Addressed to the People of England* (London, 1810), p. 46.

¹¹⁷ *Cobbett's Weekly Political Register*, 22 November 1806.

¹¹⁸ Cartwright, *Life*, Volume I, p. 390. Cartwright to Thomas Northmore, 27 June 1809.

Burdett's behaviour before and during the 1802 Middlesex election, describing it as 'seditious to a degree bordering on treason',¹²⁰ praised Burdett for his 'talents', 'courage' and 'constancy',¹²¹ and by 1805 had become a firm supporter of him, writing of his 'sincere desire ... to always see Sir Francis Burdett a member of Parliament'.¹²² Cobbett commended Burdett for his 1809 reform proposal, claiming it was 'the first great direct step towards the demolition of that system of corruption, which has so long been gnawing at the heart of the country',¹²³ and Burdett supported and 'often visited'¹²⁴ Cobbett in prison. He also chaired a dinner to celebrate Cobbett's release in July 1812 and in January 1817 Cobbett acted as Burdett's representative at a Hampden Club meeting. Cobbett himself claimed that he and Burdett were 'very intimate until the month of February, 1817'.¹²⁵ Burdett's relationship with Hunt was perhaps the most difficult. Like Cobbett, Hunt, a staunch loyalist in the early 1800s, also had concerns about Burdett's extreme radicalism, once refusing an invite to one of Horne Tooke's dinners in case he should meet with Burdett 'whom he was induced to look upon almost as a political madman, a dangerous firebrand'.¹²⁶ However, by 1805 he had grown disaffected with the government and became a supporter of reform. Hunt professed to be Burdett's 'zealous and devoted political disciple'.¹²⁷ But their relationship was never based on any personal affection. Huish, Hunt's biographer, claimed that 'it was merely their advocacy of the same line of politics, which had made them known to each other'.¹²⁸ Hunt believed that this was because of a 'blunder'¹²⁹ he had made at one of Cobbett's prison gatherings, when he had assured Burdett of his continuing support so long as Burdett promised not to '*stand still*'¹³⁰ and remained constant and consistent in his support for reform. Hunt claimed that 'from that time forward, the Baronet was not so familiar as he was before ... he manifested a degree of reserve that I had never

¹¹⁹ *The Times*, 6 August 1812.

¹²⁰ *Cobbett's Weekly Political Register*, 1 September 1804.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² *Ibid.*, 16 March 1805.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 24 June 1809.

¹²⁴ Huish, *Cobbett*, Volume I, p. 38.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, Volume I, p. 309.

¹²⁶ Hunt, *Memoirs*, Volume I, p. 502.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, Volume III, p. 26.

¹²⁸ Huish, *Hunt*, Volume I, p. 392.

¹²⁹ Hunt, *Memoirs*, Volume III, p. 27.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

previously observed'.¹³¹ A disagreement over a land transaction in 1812 also put paid to any prospect of personal friendship between the two men. In October 1816 Hunt became furious with Burdett for his refusal to present a petition from reformers to the Prince Regent, something Hunt regarded as a 'direct insult'.¹³² However, he was persuaded by Cobbett and Cartwright not to take any action against Burdett as they 'were extremely anxious not to do any thing to risk the loss of Sir Francis Burdett's support'.¹³³

However, as Hunt and Cobbett became more radicalised, and an ageing Cartwright more determined to see reform achieved during his own lifetime, a breach between Burdett and his radical allies developed. One of the main differences was over how reform would be best achieved. Burdett spoke of moderation and perseverance, seeing petitions to parliament and regular reform meetings as the best means of pushing for reform. But, by the late 1810s the radical reformers were moving towards a different and more physical type of agitation - mass meetings and so-called 'mob politics'. Burdett's call for the people to unite in the cause of reform had a different meaning from the calls of the radical reformers. While he upheld people's right to gather in order to discuss political events and prompted action in order to achieve change, believing that 'the voice of the people, publicly and frequently declared, was the only effectual mode of obtaining their object',¹³⁴ Burdett did not approve of mass meetings and threats of physical force. He refused to play a role in the mass procession organised to celebrate his release from the Tower in July 1810, fearing that it would result in riot and bloodshed, and also declined Hunt's invitation to address the Spa Fields meetings in December 1816. Instead, Burdett favoured more intimate reform meetings and dinners held in taverns and halls; meetings that would be attended by 'respectable' people, such as artisans, tradesmen and shopkeepers. Such meetings, he believed, would remain orderly and peaceful. Writing about a proposed reform meeting in August 1817 Burdett remarked that 'it would be very mischievous unless it were very respectably attended - I do not mean by that only numerously'.¹³⁵

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 29.

¹³² Ibid., p. 354.

¹³³ Ibid., p. 354-5.

¹³⁴ *The Times*, 24 March 1818.

¹³⁵ Bod., Burdett-Coutts Papers, MSS 39458, folio 7, Burdett to R. N. Bennett, 8 August 1817.

Burdett was completely opposed to any type of physical force, criticising ‘those who blustered about violent measures, whether sincere or not’, as they ‘only brought well-meaning, and good men into terrible scrapes’.¹³⁶ He believed that ‘the only security of the people was to turn upon all those who proposed violence’.¹³⁷ Burdett urged people to action, but legal and constitutional action. For example, in April 1810 he wrote to his Westminster constituents that ‘The people of England must speak out – they must do more – they must act ... ever keeping the law and constitution in view’.¹³⁸

Burdett was realistic in his approach to reform. As an experienced parliamentarian, he knew how to judge the mood of the Commons, and thus could assess when would be the best time to present reform to the House, how the House would react, what they were likely to concede to and what they would reject. It was for this reason that he was cautious and moderate in his presentation of reform proposals, alluding to what he really wanted but never being explicit about it, allowing room for debate and compromise on the subject. The radical reformers, none of whom ever had sat in parliament during this period,¹³⁹ did not have such an insight and became frustrated with Burdett for what they regarded as his lack of commitment and inconsistency. They began to see him as a man upon whom they could not rely. The differences between Burdett’s tactics and those of the radical reformers became increasingly apparent in the months after the Spa Fields riot of December 1816. In January 1817 a meeting of Hampden Club delegates from around the country was held in London. Each delegate had brought with him a petition to parliament calling for reform, many advocating universal suffrage and annual parliaments. Burdett was absent from the meeting itself but had proposed, through Cobbett, that householder rather than universal suffrage should be adopted. Hunt, and many others at the meeting disagreed, and instead it was resolved to petition for universal manhood suffrage. Cobbett tried to fight Burdett’s corner but eventually he too changed his mind and supported

¹³⁶ *The Times*, 24 March 1818.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ *New Annual Register 1810* (London, 1811), p. 57. Letter from Sir Francis Burdett to his constituents, the Electors of Westminster, 20 April 1810.

¹³⁹ Despite numerous attempts to be elected Cartwright was never elected as an MP. Hunt was eventually successful, serving as MP for Preston between 1830 and 1832. Cobbett also eventually

universal suffrage. As a result, Burdett refused to present the petitions to the Commons, causing further resentment amongst the radical reformers. However, Burdett was being practical and realistic, the radical reformers were not. Bombarding the House with petitions for radical reform so soon after the Spa Fields Riots, which the government regarded as an attempt at insurrection stood no chance of success. Burdett had learned from the failure of his 1809 reform proposal that support from moderate reformers in the House was essential for a reform motion to make any impact. In the current circumstances, any parliamentarians willing to support moderate reform had been deterred by the Spa Fields and the government was also deeply suspicious of reformers, so much so that in February 1817 it brought in bills to suspend habeas corpus and ban public meetings. Burdett did bring reform before the house in 1817, but his proposal in May only called for the House to consider the issue, it did not advocate the adoption of any specific radical reform measures. The following year, in June 1818, a time of peace and relatively little social disorder, Burdett did bring a plan of radical reform before the House, but the damage had been done. Both Hunt and Cartwright stood against Burdett at Westminster in the 1818 General Election, and in the 1819 by-election Cartwright, backed by Hunt, stood against Burdett's favoured candidate, John Cam Hobhouse. Hunt claimed that he had stood against Burdett 'from a conviction in my own mind that Sir Francis had deserted, or at least neglected, the cause of radical reform'¹⁴⁰ and because he believed Burdett had been guilty of 'gross negligence ... with respect to the cause of the people'.¹⁴¹ He also claimed to have supported Cartwright in 1819 in order to prevent Westminster from 'being made a rotten borough, under the influence of Sir Francis Burdett'.¹⁴² By March 1817 Cobbett had 'turned round upon Sir Francis, with a violent hatred, in proportion to his former friendship'¹⁴³ and all personal communication between the two had ceased.

Despite a brief revival of Burdett's standing amongst the radical reformers in 1819 and 1820, a result of his condemnation of the government for the Peterloo Massacre

became an MP, as member for Oldham between 1832 and 1835.

¹⁴⁰ Hunt, *Memoirs*, Volume III, p. 526.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 530.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 551.

¹⁴³ Huish, *Cobbett*, Volume I, p. 300.

and his show of support for the imprisoned Hunt, the mutual respect that they had once enjoyed was never recovered. Cobbett in particular became violently critical of Burdett, while Hunt and Cartwright affected great disappointment at Burdett's apparent apostasy. Cobbett regularly lambasted Burdett in his *Political Register*, accusing him of 'having abandoned the reformers', and became determined to 'bring him down'.¹⁴⁴ Hunt claimed to have felt no 'private enmity' towards Burdett, but accused him of having 'deserted his post' and thus he was compelled to oppose Burdett in order 'to convince him of his error'.¹⁴⁵ Burdett, for the most part, was unmoved. He had expressed concerns over Cobbett's behaviour in 1815, writing 'I cannot as an honest man support Cobbett',¹⁴⁶ and never forgave him for his betrayal at the Hampden Club meeting in January 1817, when Cobbett, who was supposed to act as Burdett's representative and support householder suffrage, changed his mind and supported universal suffrage instead. Disagreements over money that Burdett had given to Cobbett, the sum of two thousands pounds, which Cobbett claimed was a gift and Burdett a loan, further soured the relationship between the two men. Burdett's relationship with Hunt had never been particularly close, and while he had a great deal of respect for Cartwright, Burdett became concerned over the actions of Cartwright and his supporters, claiming that they were 'foolish' and over zealous.¹⁴⁷ It was reported in late 1816 that Burdett had become 'disgusted'¹⁴⁸ with the radical reformers and consequently with them 'he was not inclined to coalesce or co-operate with much zeal or cordiality'.¹⁴⁹ Burdett had realised that there were only two ways reform would be achieved - violent revolution, or parliamentary enactment. He favoured the latter, as he wanted to restore and uphold the existing constitution, he did not want to overthrow the current system and replace it with a completely new one. Therefore, Burdett had to break with the extra-parliamentary radical reformers and turn to those in parliament who favoured reform. This offered him the best chance of achieving the reform he actually wanted, a reform that would purify the existing

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 308.

¹⁴⁵ Hunt, *Memoirs*, Volume III, p. 580.

¹⁴⁶ Bod., Burdett-Coutts Papers, MSS 39455, folio 16. Burdett to unknown recipient, 12 June 1815.

¹⁴⁷ BL, Broughton Papers, Add MSS 47222, folio 9. Burdett to J. C. Hobhouse, 6 January 1819.

¹⁴⁸ Bourne, K., and Taylor, W. B. (eds.), *The Horner Papers: Selections from the Letters and Miscellaneous Writing of Francis Horner, M.P. 1795-1817* (Edinburgh, 1994), p. 922. John Allen to Francis Horner, 28 December 1816.

¹⁴⁹ *The New Annual Register or General Repository of History, Politics, and Literature, For the Year*

system and restore the rights and liberties of the people.

From 1817 onwards there was a noticeable shift in Burdett's reform alliances from close co-operation with the radical extra-parliamentary reformers to an association with the more moderate parliamentary supporters of reform. Although Burdett continued to attend reform meetings, they tended to be meetings attended by parliamentary advocates of reform, such as Joseph Hume, Lord Folkestone, Sir Robert Wilson, John George Lambton and Lord John Russell, rather than those attended by Hunt, Cobbett and Cartwright. In 1818 Burdett co-founded the Rota Club, a political society formed of gentlemen reformers such as Hobhouse, Sir John Throckmorton, Sir Robert Wilson, Henry Bickersteth, Douglas Kinnaird and Lord Byron. According to Hobhouse the group 'dined together once a fortnight during the sitting of parliament, read essays, concocted plans of reform, framed resolutions to be moved in Parliament, and drew up addresses for Parliamentary candidates'.¹⁵⁰ Burdett also cut all contact with Bentham, with whom he had worked closely on the 1818 reform plan. In November 1819 Burdett refused his permission for Bentham to publish their private correspondence, and a year after that contact between the two men had all but ceased, with Bentham writing to Place 'It is sad that I hear nothing from Burdett You conveyed my letter to him through Hobhouse? did you not?'.¹⁵¹ The change in Burdett's alliances from the radical extra-parliamentary to the parliamentary reformers is also evident in the memoirs of Manchester radical Samuel Bamford. Burdett features frequently in the early part of Bamford's account, particularly his recollections of the events of early 1817. Thereafter, however, mention of Burdett is reduced to a few words concerning his activities in the House, and by the time Bamford came to reminisce of 1819 and 1820 Burdett was not mentioned at all, apart from a very brief reference to his libel trial at Leicester in 1820. Hobhouse also acknowledged the change in alliances, writing in April 1821, 'Dined this day at the great Reform dinner at the City of London. Almost all the Whig Reformers there What a change since last year, when scarcely a Whig would speak to Burdett or

1817 (London, 1818), p. 268-9.

¹⁵⁰ *Broughton's Recollections*, Volume II, p. 114.

¹⁵¹ *Bentham's Correspondence*, Volume 10, p. 183. Bentham to Place, 24 November 1820.

me!’.¹⁵² Burdett also acknowledged his change in allegiances, writing to Henry Bickersteth in January 1821, ‘I grow very aristocratic; there is no dealing in important matters but with gentlemen - men of education. I don’t mean that by name reading & writing, or knowledge of the learned languages, but men of generous mould’.¹⁵³

Throughout the 1820s Burdett’s interest in parliamentary reform seemingly waned, and Catholic Emancipation became his primary focus. He even appeared to have abandoned reform altogether when in 1825 he agreed to the Disenfranchisement Bill and in 1827 when he crossed to floor of the House to back Canning, an anti-reformer (but a pro-Catholic). At the time Burdett defended his decision, claiming the sacrifices were made in order to push through the Emancipation Bill, and emphasised his continuing commitment to reform.¹⁵⁴ Once Emancipation had been passed, in April 1829, Burdett returned his attention to reform. In the Commons in February 1830 Burdett supported the reform motion of George Spencer-Churchill, the Marquis of Blandford, which proposed to disenfranchise corrupt boroughs and redistribute their seats to unrepresented areas, extend the vote to householders and repeal the Septennial Act. Burdett, who described the motion as ‘a great measure of Reform’,¹⁵⁵ spoke of ‘imperative necessity of Reform’¹⁵⁶ and declared ‘The only struggle really worth making, was for a Reform in Parliament’.¹⁵⁷ In April Burdett chaired a meeting of reformers with the purpose of establishing a subscription fund, the ‘Loyal and Patriotic Fund to Assist the Cause of Reform’, to defray the expenses of pro-Reform candidates at the upcoming election.¹⁵⁸ At a reform meeting in July 1830 Burdett encouraged unity amongst reformers and justified his lack of enthusiasm over reform in the 1820s, claiming that ‘the times did not require it’ and ‘the battle was over ... because another order of measures, another system of policy, had been adopted by the Crown and the Government’.¹⁵⁹ He also confirmed his commitment to reform,

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, Volume II, p. 145.

¹⁵³ *Bod.*, Burdett-Coutts Papers, MSS 39452, folio 214. Burdett to Henry Bickersteth, 10 January 1821.

¹⁵⁴ See Chapter 2, Section III.

¹⁵⁵ *PD*, New Series, Volume XXII, p. 705.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 710.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 706.

¹⁵⁸ See *The Times*, 28 April 1831.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 17 July 1830.

claiming to be an 'advocate for the fullest reform in the system of representation'.¹⁶⁰ However, Burdett continued to be flexible over the type of reform he would accept. In February 1830 he remarked that

He had himself proposed two modes of Reform, one of which consisted in giving the right of suffrage to all persons who paid direct taxes in the shape of either church-rates or poor-rates. Let that mode be adopted, or any other mode, for infusing fresh spirit into the House, and he should be content.¹⁶¹

Again in July 1830 he remarked that 'he was bound, as a practical man of the world, to accept the co-operation of those who might not be disposed to go as far as he would'.¹⁶² With opposition still strong in both Houses of Parliament, it would have done the cause of reform few favours had Burdett pushed for annual parliaments and universal suffrage and refused to accept anything less. As has been established, Burdett had a pragmatic approach to all of his political campaigns and was willing to compromise over the finer details so long as the outcome was consistent with his own objectives, and reform was no exception.

To this effect, Burdett made further attempts to unite extra-parliamentary and parliamentary reformers in the cause of reform, believing that unity and organisation were necessary in order to support the passage of the Reform Bill through the House. In July 1830 Burdett remarked that

the attainment of parliamentary reform has been hitherto impeded, if not prevented, by two principal causes: - first by differences of opinion relative to the details of reform; and secondly by the want of some permanent and active body or association to expose abuses, suggest remedies, and concentrate public opinion.¹⁶³

In late 1831 he chaired the newly formed National Political Union (NPU), a middle-class reform society which was established in response to the radical National Union of Working Classes. At the first meeting, held on 31 October 1831, Burdett

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ *PD*, New Series, Volume XXII, p. 710.

¹⁶² *The Times*, 17 July 1830.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

expressed the need for unity amongst reformers, claiming that 'Without such system of combined action, the efforts of reformers would be comparatively wasted',¹⁶⁴ and urged those present to put aside their differences over the particulars of reform and support 'to the utmost that King and those ministers in their noble plan of national regeneration'.¹⁶⁵ Problems arose when the radical William Lovett proposed that the NPU commit itself to universal suffrage and when another radical, Thomas Wakley, proposed that half the council of the NPU should be composed of the working-classes. Burdett opposed both resolutions, claiming 'it was the duty of parties to give up different fancies for the accomplishment of a measure sufficiently substantial', and rejecting 'any uncalled for distinction of class'.¹⁶⁶ He informed the meeting that 'They were bound to support a Government who had the boldness and honesty to introduce a measure that terrified the enemies of reform and astonished even its friends'.¹⁶⁷ Burdett had wanted the NPU to exist solely to support ministers in the passage of the Reform Bill with a view to disbanding it after the Act had been passed. He told Hobhouse that he had only agreed to chair the NPU in order to avoid radicals from taking it over, remarking 'if he did not put himself at the head of this Union some designing man or men would'.¹⁶⁸ However, the more radical elements of the NPU wanted it to become a more permanent reform society which would continue to agitate for more extensive reform until universal suffrage was achieved. Wakley's proposal was passed despite Burdett's opposition and over the following months a series of disagreements and misunderstandings arose between Burdett and the Union Council over the radical direction that the Council was taking, with Burdett threatening to withdraw from the NPU in December 1831. In early 1832 things finally came to a head. On 2 February Burdett resigned the chair and stormed out of a NPU meeting after it was resolved to send an address attacking the aristocracy and a petition condemning the government for its timidity over reform of parliament.

At the same time as Burdett was involved with the NPU, he was also in close contact

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 1 November 1831.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ *Broughton's Recollections*, Volume IV, p. 146.

with the Whig government. He ‘dined twice with Lord Grey’¹⁶⁹ in late 1831 and corresponded with him regularly between September 1831 and February 1832. Burdett believed it was important to support Grey’s government at this crucial time and had complete confidence in their commitment to the cause of reform. In September 1831 he assured Grey of his ‘ardent desire in every way in my power to the support of your administration’.¹⁷⁰ A month later Burdett outlined his determination to support ministers in a letter to the radical lecturer Rowland Detrosier, remarking ‘the whole of our efforts ought to be such as support & not such as embarrass the King and Ministers’.¹⁷¹ He complimented ministers for having ‘voluntarily undertaken for the People a labour equal to the twelve of Hercules’ and confirmed his trust in them, remarking “‘have patience & they will pay you all’”; such are my sentiments, & no power less than omnipotent can make me swerve a hair’s breadth from them, or from the line of conduct they necessarily point out’.¹⁷²

Burdett’s eagerness to co-operate with the Whig government, despite the fact that its proposed reform did not advocate annual parliaments and universal suffrage, is explained by his belief that it offered the best hope of a substantial reform being achieved. The tide was turning in favour of reform. The repeal of the Test and Corporations Acts, the passage of Catholic Emancipation and other economic and penal reforms passed in the 1820s, coupled with the succession of a new King, William IV, who was less hostile to reform, made him hopeful of its passage. In July 1830 he remarked that ‘he saw no just grounds to despair’, as ‘The progress of the public mind was highly favourable to it [reform]; so was the general influence of the circumstances. They were entering a new reign’.¹⁷³ In March 1831 he assured his Westminster constituents that ‘they were almost certain of success’ because they had a King ‘who was determined upon doing towards his people what he considered to be just’ and ‘an Administration which was determined to support the King in his patriotic endeavours’.¹⁷⁴ Consequently, Burdett was keen not to ruin the prospect of a Reform

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 150.

¹⁷⁰ Bod., Burdett-Coutts Papers, MSS 39454, folio 123. Burdett to Grey, 6 September 1831.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., MSS 39455, folio 42. Burdett to Rowland Detrosier, 28 November 1831.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ *The Times*, 17 July 1830.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 5 March 1831.

Bill being passed by pushing for too many concessions. A few weeks before the first Reform Bill was presented to the House of Commons, in March 1831, Burdett presented a number of petitions calling for reform to the House. He made little comment on their content, nor on what type of reform they advocated. Hunt criticised Burdett for the 'cavalier manner' in which he presented the petitions, condemning him for not commenting on their 'numerical importance'.¹⁷⁵ But, this event is merely demonstrative of Burdett's pragmatism as a politician. This was a crucial time for the parliamentary reformers and they would not risk doing anything that might tip the balance against them. To push for a specific type of reform in the House might alienate members. It was better to let the petitions speak for themselves in showing the support of the nation for the measure and not confuse the introduction of the bill by initiating debate on the finer points of reform. In a letter to Francis Place in October 1831 Burdett explained his motives in supporting the ministry, claiming it was 'I am convinced our only chance of success immediately, & peaceably'.¹⁷⁶ Shortly after the bill had been passed, Burdett justified his unwillingness to push for specific reforms at a Westminster dinner held to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of his election to Westminster:

He confessed his leading principle had been not to embarrass ministers on minor considerations; and he had therefore forborne on a variety of topics to press his opinions - he had forborne to disturb the great proceeding itself on points which in his mind might admit of being modified, thinking it vain and childish to risk the whole measure for some minutiae, the pressing of which might occasion a colourable majority against ministers, by means of which the great measure of reform might have been lost'.¹⁷⁷

Burdett was satisfied with the terms of the 1832 Reform Act. At the twenty-fifth annual anniversary dinner of Burdett's election to Westminster, in June 1832, he expressed his satisfaction that 'they now had the good fortune no longer to meet to

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 26 February 1831.

¹⁷⁶ BL, Place Papers, Add MSS 35149, folio 103. Burdett to Place, 24 October 1831.

¹⁷⁷ *The Times*, 28 June 1832

advocate or promote [reform], but to congratulate each other on its success'.¹⁷⁸ Burdett regarded the Reform Act as 'an extraordinary, gratifying, and complete success, which not only answered but exceeded all their wishes'.¹⁷⁹ He believed that the Act had been effective in defeating corruption in parliament, declaring in February 1833:

This was no longer a party and a packed House of Parliament, that was at the command of the Minister, who might come down and ask for any powers, get them when he pleased, use or abuse them at his will, and be certain of indemnity after all was over. This was a Parliament that would exercise a controlling power - would grant only what was necessary - would watch most strictly the execution of the powers it had confided, and would take care that, in all that was done, the attainment of that one object was kept in view, without which all else would be fruitless - peace.¹⁸⁰

Burdett regarded his battle with the corrupt parliament as over, remarking in November 1835, 'My war, political, was with the boroughmongers; I have lived to see them, thank Heaven! directly interred; - being dead, so is my enmity'.¹⁸¹ He showed little enthusiasm for Chartism, apart from to demonstrate concern for Chartist prisoners, speaking out against their ill-treatment in the Commons in August 1839. Burdett also had a great deal of affection for the Chartist leader, Feargus O'Connor, son of his very good friend Roger O'Connor, and in 1817 gave him some money towards stocking a farm. Burdett's acceptance of the Reform Act, and the fact that he did not call for or support calls for further, more extensive reform, was regarded as a betrayal by his former radical allies, who subjected him to bitter criticism, and by some of his Westminster constituents, who in 1837 called for his resignation. His reputation as a reformer was even further damaged when, after winning the Westminster by-election of May 1837, Burdett resigned his seat and announced his retirement from politics, only to return to the House in November as MP for North Wiltshire in the Conservative interest.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ *PD*, 3rd Series, Volume XV, p. 587.

¹⁸¹ *Sir Francis Burdett to the Independent Electors of Westminster*, November 1835.

¹⁸² See section III.

Burdett was unapologetic, declaring during the 1837 Westminster by-election that he was 'not ashamed to say that I abandoned my plan [for universal suffrage and annual parliaments] as that which is now adopted met the wishes of the greatest number of Reformers, and as there were many Reformers who would not have agreed to any other'.¹⁸³ He remained committed to reform, claiming 'I am, I have always been, a Reformer',¹⁸⁴ but was unwilling to back radical reform measures, instead favouring 'safe, constitutional, practicable reform'.¹⁸⁵ He would not 'consent to embark on an ocean of change to which I can see no limit'.¹⁸⁶ Burdett knew that problems remained with the electoral system, such as corruption at elections, particularly in Ireland, and was keen to see these wrinkles ironed out. However, his primary goal, of ridding the Commons of corruption, had seemingly been achieved and so for the moment no further changes to the fundamental elements of the electoral system, such as the franchise or the duration of parliaments, was necessary. He considered himself 'precluded, by the passing of the Reform Bill, from making any alteration in our elective system'.¹⁸⁷ Moreover, Burdett believed that the danger to liberty and the constitution came not from parliament, but from the radical O'Connellites who he believed wanted to radically alter the political system to ensure their own dominance.¹⁸⁸ Thus, for Burdett it became about defending reform, rather than agitating for it. His support for Peel's Conservatives came from this, as he believed that they wanted 'salutary reform - not adventures in wild speculation, misled by stupid vanity or ambition, or rather a love of notoriety'.¹⁸⁹ The O'Connellite Whigs, meanwhile, 'were not reformers, but promoters of rash schemes of revolutionary tendency'.¹⁹⁰

Burdett was not alone in his 'conversion' to Conservatism. Between 1833 and 1837

¹⁸³ *The Times*, 11 May 1837.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 23 April 1838.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 11 May 1837.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 11 May 1837.

¹⁸⁸ See Chapter 2, section IV.

¹⁸⁹ *The Times*, 20 October 1837.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

thirty-one MPs who had voted in favour of reform in 1832 became Conservatives.¹⁹¹ At a Conservative meeting in North Staffordshire on 7 August 1841 the health of Sir Oswald Moseley was drunk, 'a gentleman who, like Sir Francis Burdett had been left by the party to whom he once belonged, and now cordially supported the Conservatives'.¹⁹² Burdett denied that he had changed his political principles, writing 'My political sentiments have experienced no change - but many objects, which I used to contend for, have been attained, & such questions should now be set at rest, in order that other matters of real national importance may thus be better attended to'.¹⁹³ To a meeting of deputations of electors from Westminster parishes held at his home in St James's Place in May 1837, Burdett denied the charge of having 'having forsaken his principles', claiming 'He was, as he had ever been, a firm supporter of the constitution of England'.¹⁹⁴ For Burdett, supporting the Conservatives was a pragmatic move and the only way of protecting 'the old established, well-tried, and unrivalled institutions of this country' from 'the theories and fancies of self-styled patriots and visionary enthusiasts'.¹⁹⁵ It was not he who had abandoned his principles, it was the Whigs who had gone too far.

III

Burdett's image as a reformer during his lifetime was multi-faceted. He was viewed in a various ways by different groups at different stages of his career, and his reputation as a reformer during his career hinges upon his association with the various reform groups. As Burdett's relationships with these groups changed, so did his standing as a reformer. In the late 1800s and early 1810s, Burdett was closely associated with the radical extra-parliamentary reformers and the radical Whigs, who looked to him as a leader of the movement. This ensured that the more moderate parliamentary supporters of reform viewed him with suspicion, a feeling exacerbated by Burdett's lack of commitment to any specific type of reform. The opponents of reform saw

¹⁹¹ Hoppen, K. T., 'Roads to Democracy: Electioneering and Corruption in Nineteenth-Century England and Ireland', *History* 81 (October 1996), p. 570.

¹⁹² *The Times*, 8 August 1841.

¹⁹³ Bod., Burdett-Coutts Papers, MSS 39455, folio 40. Burdett to Mr Stephen Dann, 8 May 1837.

¹⁹⁴ *The Times*, 6 May 1837.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 28 January 1839.

Burdett as a dangerous radical at this time, believing that he was intent on the violent overthrow of the government. Therefore, at this stage in his career Burdett was generally viewed as a 'radical' and this is reflected in the prints of this period. However, after the breakdown of his relationship with the radical reformers in the late 1810s, Burdett began to co-operate more with the parliamentary supporters of reform who came to view him as a valuable ally, believing him to have moderated his ideas. Consequently, Burdett's old allies, the radical extra-parliamentary reformers, saw Burdett as a traitor and accused him of having turned his back on the cause of reform. They too believed that Burdett had become a moderate reformer, some even regarding him as an enemy to reform. It is this image of Burdett, as an apostate, that has damaged his legacy as a reformer, leading to the impression amongst historians of the nineteenth century that Burdett made an insignificant contribution to the parliamentary reform movement,¹⁹⁶ when in fact he played an important role in raising the profile of reform and keeping it on the political agenda.

During the 1810s, the extra-parliamentary radical reformers and the radical Whigs looked to Burdett as a leader of the parliamentary reform movement. His role was seen as important and significant, with Cartwright claiming that Burdett was 'of course the leader' of 'the cause of Parliamentary Reform'.¹⁹⁷ Cobbett recognised Burdett's important role in the reform movement, remarking in May 1807 that he 'anticipate[d] the most important Constitutional Reforms from the election of Sir Francis Burdett',¹⁹⁸ and claiming in 1808 that Burdett was a valuable asset to reformers because of his 'thousands of valuable friends'.¹⁹⁹ Jeremy Bentham also acknowledged how useful Burdett was as a spokesman for the movement, writing in 1812,

being the hero of the mob, and having it in his power to do a great deal of harm, as well as a great deal of good, and being rather disposed to do good, and, indeed, having done a good deal already, [Burdett] must not

¹⁹⁶ See Chapter 4, section I.

¹⁹⁷ Cartwright, *Life*, Volume I, p. 390. Cartwright to Thomas Northmore, 27 June 1809.

¹⁹⁸ *Cobbett's Weekly Political Register*, 23 May 1807.

¹⁹⁹ Melville, L. (ed.), *The Life and Letters of William Cobbett in England and America* (2 Vols., London, 1913), Volume II, p. 13. William Cobbett to John Wright, 10 April 1808.

be neglected.²⁰⁰

In 1837 it was claimed that in the 1810s 'The zeal of Sir Francis enlisted in his favour the sympathies of the people; and the leading democrats, who quickly perceived the advantage they might derive from his rank and fortune, advanced him to the head of their party'.²⁰¹ The radical Whigs also regarded Burdett as something of a leader in the cause of reform. Thomas Brand, for example, considered Burdett the 'principal supporter' of reform.²⁰² Gwyllym Lloyd Wardle looked to Burdett as a leading light in the cause of reform, remarking in 1809 that he was 'considerably indebted' to Burdett for his 'advice' and 'assistance From him I daily received instruction, which no man was more capable to give - instruction to advance the interests of his country, and to unfold the corruption by which those interests were prevented'.²⁰³ At a dinner of the Livery of London in April 1809 attended by several radical Whigs, including Brand, Wardle, Samuel Whitbread, Robert Waithman and Lord Folkestone, a toast was proposed to 'The cause of Parliamentary Reform, and Sir Francis Burdett'.²⁰⁴ In 1830 it was maintained that Burdett 'was regarded as the head and leader' of the Radical party in parliament.²⁰⁵ Henry Brougham made a similar remark, claiming that

After Lord Grey's removal to the Upper House [in 1807], sir Francis Burdett became the most unwearied and powerful champion of reform; and the extensive influence which his station and abilities gave him with the people, had an incalculable effect in keeping alive their zeal for the question, at times when extraordinary efforts were required to prevent its total extinction.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁰ *Bentham's Correspondence*, Volume 8, p. 252. Bentham to John Mulford, 9 July 1812.

²⁰¹ Cooke, G. W., *The History of Party; from the rise of the Whig and Tory factions in the reign of Charles II to the passing of the Reform Bill, Volume III, 1762-1832* (London, 1837), p. 447.

²⁰² *CPD*, Volume XVII, p. 124.

²⁰³ *Parliamentary Reform 1809*, p. 18.

²⁰⁴ *The Times*, 22 April 1809. Burdett did not attend the dinner.

²⁰⁵ Huish, R., *Memoirs of George the Fourth, descriptive of the most interesting scenes of his private and public life and the important events of his memorable reign; with characteristic sketches of all the celebrated men who were his friends and companions as Prince and his Ministers and Counsellors as a Monarch* (2 Vols., London, 1830), Volume II, p. 14.

²⁰⁶ Brougham, H., *Speeches of Henry Lord Brougham, Upon Questions Relating to Public Rights, Duties, and Interests; with Historical Introductions and a Critical Dissertation Upon the Eloquence of the Ancients* (4 Vols., Edinburgh, 1838), Volume II, p. 551.

However, Burdett's reluctance to commit to specific reforms caused problems. It was something that was commented on at the time. For example, in May 1811 Coleridge remarked in *The Courier* 'Sir F. B. wants reform only. What that is to be, and how far it is to go he does not know at present'.²⁰⁷ In 1817 *The New Annual Register* noted that Burdett 'never expressed any very clear or definite ideas' with regards to annual parliaments and universal suffrage.²⁰⁸ At the Westminster election in 1819 the radical Sir Charles Wolseley condemned Burdett for being 'one thing one day, and another thing another'.²⁰⁹ As a result of this ambiguity, and his association with the radical extra-parliamentary reformers like Cobbett and Hunt, some of the more moderate parliamentary supporters of reform, viewed Burdett with suspicion. William Windham, for example, claimed that he believed Burdett was 'more of a weak enthusiast than of an ill-intentioned man' who needed to be rescued 'from more dangerous connections'.²¹⁰ He also claimed that Burdett's 1809 reform proposal was absurd.²¹¹ Poet and reviewer Robert Southey²¹² condemned Burdett's 1809 reform proposal, claiming it was 'The direct road to anarchy'.²¹³ In June 1810 Lord Grey condemned the radical reformers, claiming that although he did not believe that they acted on 'improper or unworthy motives The path they are treading is dangerous in the extreme, and demands the most vigilant caution to prevent it from leading to a fatal termination'.²¹⁴ He also remarked that the radical reformers advocated a type of reform that 'would tend to the annihilation of some of the most valuable rights of the subject' and claimed that Burdett was a 'supporter' of such ideas.²¹⁵ But this mistrust was reciprocal, with Burdett also being suspicious of the moderate Whigs intentions

²⁰⁷ Erdman, D. V. (ed.), *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Essays on His Times in The Morning Post and The Courier* (3 Vols., London, 1978), p. 164.

²⁰⁸ *The New Annual Register or General Repository of History, Politics, and Literature, For the Year 1817* (London, 1818), p. 269.

²⁰⁹ *Westminster Election 1819*, p. 97.

²¹⁰ Earl of Rosebery (ed.), *The Windham Papers: The Life and Correspondence of the Rt. Hon. William Windham 1750-1810, a Member of Pitt's First Cabinet and the Ministry of "All the Talents" including hitherto unpublished letters from George III, the Dukes of York and Gloucester, Pitt, Fox, Burke, Canning, Lords Grenville, Minto, Castlereagh and Nelson, Malone, Cobbett, Dr. Johnson, Dr. Burney etc* (2 Vols, London, 1908), Volume II, p. 235. William Windham to Thomas Aymot, 25 September 1804.

²¹¹ Baring, Mrs. H. (ed.), *The Diary of the Right Hon. William Windham, 1784 to 1810* (London, 1866), p. 491.

²¹² Southey (1774-1843) was a radical in his early years. However, he supported the war with France and by 1810-11 had moderated his views.

²¹³ Southey, R., *Essays, Moral and Political* (2 Vols., London, 1832), p. 10.

²¹⁴ *CPD*, Volume XVII, p. 564-5.

towards parliamentary reform. In 1810 he wrote to Lady Burdett about Whig attempts to prevent reform meetings and their plans to introduce into the House of Commons 'some Reform of Par[liamen]t', claiming 'The object will no doubt be to prevent a real one'.²¹⁶ To Hobhouse in December 1818 Burdett described the Whigs as having 'meanness shallowness heartlessness pusillanimity not courage either for honesty or villainy. Tame cheaters but duping no one but themselves'.²¹⁷ He also commented that where the Whigs were concerned 'the beer always was half froth'.²¹⁸

By the opponents of reform Burdett was consistently regarded as a dangerous radical, who wanted to incite revolution in order to overthrow the existing constitution. This was no doubt encouraged by Burdett's association with Irish revolutionaries in his early career,²¹⁹ and enhanced by the disturbances surrounding his imprisonment in 1810.²²⁰ In 1804 it was claimed that 'A full and fair representation is precisely the remedy, by which Sir Francis Burdett's friends, the Corresponding Society, have been so long endeavouring to overthrow the Constitution'.²²¹ In 1807 Burdett was condemned for his 'inflammatory addresses', which were 'formed on the model of revolutionary school of Paris'.²²² He was also branded 'a man, whose obvious aim it is ... to inflame the public mind to acts of revolutionary violence'.²²³ In January 1809 Canning described Burdett's claims that 'the country was sinking',²²⁴ and would continue to do so without reform, as 'dangerous in their nature and character'.²²⁵ Sir James Hall, MP for Mitchell in Cornwall, described Burdett's 1809 reform proposal as amounting to 'complete and radical revolution' and claimed Burdett's conduct was 'extremely dangerous'.²²⁶ In 1810 it was claimed that Burdett's 'faction' were 'crafty

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 569.

²¹⁶ Bod., Burdett-Coutts Papers, MSS 39464, folio 5. Burdett to Lady Burdett, 1810.

²¹⁷ BL, Broughton Papers, Add MSS 47222, folio 5. Burdett to J. C. Hobhouse [4 December 1818].

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, folio 7. Burdett to J. C. Hobhouse, 30 December 1818.

²¹⁹ See Chapter 2, section I.

²²⁰ See Chapter 1, section III.

²²¹ *A Letter to the Freeholders of Middlesex; containing an examination of the objections made to the return at the close of the late Middlesex election; and remarks on the political character and conduct of Sir Francis Burdett, Bart. by an attentive observer* (London, 1804), p. 87.

²²² *The Christian Observer, conducted by Members of the Established Church*, Volume VI (London, 1807), p. 346.

²²³ *Ibid.*, p. 347.

²²⁴ *CPD*, Volume XII, p. 237.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 239.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, Volume XIV, p. 1063.

and active demagogues who stimulate and feed the base and malignant passions of the ignorant and ill-disposed'.²²⁷ It was also claimed that the motives of this group 'aim at the destruction of society, for the acquisition of personal interest, or the gratification of criminal ambition'.²²⁸ In 1811 American clergyman John Bristed, distinguished between the 'strictures of the Edinburgh Review and the speeches of the opposition in Parliament' and the 'ignorant scurrility of Cobbett's Political Register and the ravings of Sir Francis Burdett, and his jacobin-reform faction at the Crown-and-Anchor',²²⁹ claiming that the former, despite their opposition to the government and their support for reform, were 'resolute to maintain the Constitution and government of Britain',²³⁰ while the latter were not.

Prints of the 1800s and 1810s reflect the image of Burdett as a dangerous radical who wanted to overthrow the government and incite revolution, particularly around the time of his first parliamentary reform proposal of June 1809. Samuel de Wilde's *A Second Sight View of the Blessings of Radical Reform* (1 May 1809) shows a group of radicals, including Burdett, Horne Tooke, Cobbett, Folkestone, Wardle and Whitbread, attacking Britannia. Napoleon is depicted as a vulture swooping to feast on her remains.²³¹ Another de Wilde print, *The Reformers Dinner* (1 June 1809), depicts a scene of drunken debauchery at a Crown and Anchor dinner held on 1 May. Burdett is shown in the centre of the print waving his glass and a bonnet rouge. Cochrane, Cartwright, Madocks and Bosville are also featured. Cochrane is shown smashing a crown with his sabre, while in Madocks pocket is a paper entitled 'More plans to blow up the Ministry'.²³² Gillray's *True Reform of Parliament, i.e. Patriots lighting a Revolutionary Bonfire in New Palace Yard* (14 June 1809) shows Burdett, holding a bonnet rouge, inciting a mob to destroy parliament. At his feet lies a trampled sceptre, a crown, and a scroll, upon which is written 'Resolution of the Whig Club; Resolved - That it is the decided Opinion of this Club that no Substantial & permament [sic] Good can be derived by the country, from any change of Ministry,

²²⁷ *The Faction detected and despised* (London, 1810), p. 3-4.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

²²⁹ Bristed, J., *The Resources of the British Empire, Together with a View of the Probable Result of the Present Contest Between Britain and France* (New York, 1811), p. 353.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*

²³¹ BMS 11328. See Appendix 1.

unless accompanied by an entire change of System - accomplish'd by an entire Reform of Parliament'. Bosville, Cobbett, Whitbread and Horne Tooke assist Burdett, the latter setting fire to a pile of documents, including the Holy Bible, Magna Carta, Bill of Rights, with a flaming brand marked 'Sedition'.²³³ In George Cruikshank's *National Phrenzy or John Bull and his Doctors* (1 December 1813) an unwell John sits in a chair and is swamped by doctors. Burdett, dressed as a butcher-surgeon, is shown wielding a saw and an axe, both inscribed reform, and remarks, 'I knew they would drive him Mad at last nothing can save him but applying the Axe to the Root or Sawing off the excrescences of ye State'. A man in a legal wig and gown brandishing a clyster-pipe inscribed 'Law of Libel', seizes Burdett by the throat and remarks 'Curse you what do you want here'.²³⁴

This image of reformers as revolutionaries was encouraged by disturbances of the late 1810s, particularly the Spa Fields Riots and Peterloo, and the discovery of the Cato Street Conspiracy in 1820. Burdett also continued to be depicted in this way in prints by George Cruikshank. *A Match for the King's Plate - By Hacks - The Coalition Lamb carrying Double against the Baronet's Rat Tailed Hobby* (27 February 1819) shows the candidates for the Westminster by-election racing towards the Treasury gates. Sitting astride a lamb are the Tory candidate George Lamb, carrying a banner inscribed 'Church and King', and the Whig candidate John Cam Hobhouse, carrying a banner inscribed 'Glorious Revolution'. Behind them riding a horse is Burdett, his sword aimed towards Lamb. Sitting on the hind quarters of Burdett's horse sit an ape and a monster, each holding a tricolour banner, one inscribed 'Universal Suffrage' and the other 'Radical Reform'. In the background, and presumably out of the running, is an old Carthorse (Cartwright) being ridden by a Huntsman (Hunt).²³⁵ In *Radical Quacks giving a New Constitution to John Bull* (4 February 1821), Burdett and Hobhouse have amputated John's legs, 'Church' and 'State', replacing them with peg legs, 'Universal Suffrage' and 'Religious Freedom'. John's new legs rest on two books, Paine's *Rights of Man* and *Age of Reason* and his head rests on a pillow

²³² BMS 11335. See Appendix 2.

²³³ BMS 11338. See Appendix 3.

²³⁴ BMS 12110. See Appendix 4.

²³⁵ BMS 13204. See Appendix 5.

inscribed 'False Promises' and 'Reformers Opinions'. French Revolutionary images are displayed around the print - John's Hat, his sling, the bottle of medicine at Hobhouse's feet and the French dandy in the far left of the frame who remarks 'I may succeed here as in France'. Burdett, who is bleeding John, says to his patient 'Mr. Bull, you have lived too well, but when we have renovated your Constitution according to our plan the reform will be so Complete -! that you will never be troubled with any fulness whatsoever!'.²³⁶ *The Root of King's Evil* (1820) depicts a clerical magistrate at work in his library being confronted by a demon standing on a liberty cap and carrying two pikes, on one of which is skewered a bishops' head, and the other a broken crown. Attached to one of the pikes is a tricolour flag on which is written 'Blood! Blood!! Blood!!! Reform and Plunder' and a list of Radicals names, including Thistlewood, Cobbett, Paine, Hunt, and Burdett.²³⁷

But as the 1820s progressed, Burdett came to be seen as a more moderate and respectable reformer. This was occasioned by his estrangement from the extra-parliamentary radicals and his willingness 'to support the Whigs, provided they will pledge themselves to support any substantial or effectual Reform of the Representation of the People in the Commons House of Parliament'.²³⁸ In 1821 Byron distinguished between Burdett and the '*radicals* ... such very low imitations of the Jacobins',²³⁹ identifying Cartwright and Hunt amongst the latter. In 1822 it was noted that Burdett and Hobhouse, although 'approach[ing] more nearly in their language to the radicals, [they] are still not regarded as belonging to that party, with which they never act and have nothing in common'.²⁴⁰ Burdett was also hailed as the 'Luminary of the Whig-Radicals'²⁴¹ at this time. In 1825 Burdett was complimented for 'relinquishing by agreeable and rapid degrees, the violent enthusiasm, which has

²³⁶ BMS 13714. See Appendix 6.

²³⁷ BMS 13503. See Appendix 7.

²³⁸ Hobhouse, J. C., *A Defence of the People in Reply to Lord Erskine's "Two Defences of the Whigs"* (London, 1819), p. 4.

²³⁹ *Byron's Letters and Journals*, Volume VIII, p. 240. Byron to J. C. Hobhouse, 12 October 1821. Byron made a similar distinction between Burdett and the radical reformers in 1819, remarking 'I am and have been for *reform* always - but not for the *reformers* - I saw enough of them at the Hampden Club - Burdett is the only one of them in whose company a Gentleman would be seen unless at a Public meeting - or in a Public house' (Ibid., Volume VI, p. 166. Byron to J. C. Hobhouse, 26 June 1819).

²⁴⁰ Everitt, A. H., *Europe: Or a General Survey of the Present Situation of the Principal Powers; with Conjectures of the Future Prospects by a Citizen of the United States* (Boston, 1822), p. 272-3.

²⁴¹ *The Country Constitutional Guardian and Literary Magazine*, Volume I (Bristol, 1822), p. 332.

unhappily tainted his past political career....Within the last two years, he has astonishingly moderated his opinions'.²⁴² *The Monthly Repository* also noted that Burdett had 'moderated his tone as a reformer'.²⁴³ Burdett's increasing 'respectability' as a reformer in the 1820s and 1830s is evident from his frequent correspondence with Grey around the time of the passage of the Reform Bill, and the offer of a peerage from Grey in 1831. In prints on the subject of reform from the early 1830s feature Burdett is featured prominently amongst the Whig reformers. Seymour's *Ear-Whigs* (6 July 1830) shows Burdett in conference with Grey, Brougham, and the Duke of Buckingham.²⁴⁴ *The Reformers Attack on the Old Rotten Trees; or the Foul Nests of the Cormorants in Danger* (c. April 1831) shows Burdett amongst a group of parliamentary reformers, including Grey, Brougham, Lansdowne and Althorp, who are pushing down a tree marked the 'Rotten Borough System'. Frantically trying to support the tree are the anti-reform group, among them Wellington, Ellenborough and Newcastle.²⁴⁵ In Isaac Cruikshank's *The Glorious Reform in Parliament* (10 May 1831), which shows Lord John Russell standing at the top of a pillar of reform that the anti-Reformers are trying to push over, Burdett is shown standing amongst the parliamentary reformers, which include Grey and Brougham.²⁴⁶ *The Balance of Power in 1831* (May 1831) similarly depicts Burdett in alliance with the Whig Reformers. The print shows John Bull balancing a plank on his shoulders. At one end of the plank sits the Tories - a bishop, the Duke of Cumberland, Wellington, Peel and Wetherell - while at the other end sits the Whig Reformers - Grey, Brougham, Russell, O'Connell and Burdett.²⁴⁷ *Reform*, a print from the *Weekly Dispatch* in January 1832, shows Britannia holding an enormous flag with the pennant 'Reform'. On the flag is the faces of the King, Grey, Brougham, Russell and Burdett. In the background are two ships 'Reform' and 'Anti-Reform', the latter of which is sinking.²⁴⁸ *A Memento of the Great Public Question of Reform* (15 April

²⁴² Thomas, J. P., *My Thought Book* (London, 1825), p. 136.

²⁴³ *The Monthly Repository of Theology and General Literature*, June 1826.

²⁴⁴ Bod., John Johnson Political and Satirical Prints Collection, Political Cartoons 3 (39). See Appendix 8.

²⁴⁵ BMS 16650. See Appendix 9.

²⁴⁶ BMS 16677. See Appendix 10. This print is a reworking of another print of the same name in which Burdett is not present. See BMS 16676.

²⁴⁷ BMS 11680. See Appendix 11. Burdett is shown amongst the same group of reformers in *The Players! Or Politicians Amusing the Public by Subscription* (1831). See BMS 16692.

²⁴⁸ BMS 16924. See Appendix 12.

1832) shows a British lion shooting lightning bolts of 'reform' towards the Tories. At the top of the print is the King surrounded by the figureheads of reform - Grey, Russell, Althorp, Brougham, Lansdowne, Holland, Hume, Stanley and Burdett.²⁴⁹

The radical reformers, meanwhile, began to view Burdett as a traitor, a deserter and a turncoat. The beginnings of this change occurred in the late 1810s when the differences between the tactics Burdett and the radical extra-parliamentary reformers became clear. Burdett's refusal to attend the Spa Fields Meetings, his preference for householder suffrage over universal suffrage in January 1817 and his opposition to Hunt and Cartwright in the Westminster elections of 1818 and 1819 marked the beginnings of Burdett's drift away from the radical reformers and towards the Whig reformers. At the 1819 Westminster by-election Hunt declared that Burdett was 'a political apostate'.²⁵⁰ Burdett was condemned in the *Black Dwarf* for championing the candidacy of Hobhouse, who refused to commit to universal suffrage, over Cartwright in the 1819 Westminster by-election. It was alleged that Burdett did this because he had 'lost all regard, both for his own reputation, and the cause of reform'.²⁵¹ It was also claimed that Burdett refused to support Cartwright because 'it would open the people's eyes' to his deficiencies as a reformer and lead them to exclaim, 'Behold the veteran of FOUR SCORE has done more in a MONTH than the Baronet has done in TWENTY YEARS!'.²⁵² The radical Sir Charles Wolseley also criticised Burdett for supporting Hobhouse over Cartwright and noted the damage it would do to his standing as a reformer, remarking

You have outstripped all you compeers in the political race we have been running for these twenty five years past; but this swerving from the *course*, has enabled humbler individuals to gain upon your steps, and without considerable exertion, you will not again leave them behind; you must be content to remain one out of many, instead of the only figure, amongst a million of cyphers.²⁵³

This perception of Burdett as an apostate was encouraged by his actions in the 1820s,

²⁴⁹ BMS 16924. See Appendix 13.

²⁵⁰ *Westminster Election 1819*, p. 106 and 138.

²⁵¹ *The Black Dwarf*, Volume III (London, 1819), p. 118.

²⁵² *Ibid.*

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 233.

particularly his support for the Disenfranchisement Bill in 1825 and his backing of Canning as Prime Minister in 1827. In his *Weekly Political Register* Cobbett lambasted Burdett for agreeing to disenfranchise the forty-shilling freeholders in Ireland, labelling him an 'old deserter', and declaring 'it was Burdett, who was the *great advocate for the disenfranchisement*'.²⁵⁴ In August 1826 he described Burdett as 'inconstant', 'fickle', 'capricious', a 'shilly-shally' and a 'wholly inefficient and useless man',²⁵⁵ claiming 'He has never done any thing for the people; he will never do anything for the people; not a man in England is there more afraid of seeing a Reform in Parliament than he'.²⁵⁶ At the dinner to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of Burdett's election to Westminster in May 1827 Cobbett interrupted Burdett's speech, calling him 'a traitor in the cause of the people'.²⁵⁷ In *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* in 1827 Burdett 'who has advocated Universal Suffrage' was condemned for now being 'the sworn brother of a Premier who is the inveterate enemy of all Parliamentary Reform'.²⁵⁸ Burdett was criticised again in April 1830 for being 'the servile supporter of the Ministry' in 1827,²⁵⁹ claiming he turned his back on reform because he 'dreamed of incorporation with the Wellington Cabinet', and that he had only returned his attentions to reform in 1830 because 'a new election is approaching, and of course Sir Francis Burdett is once more an enthusiastic supporter of reform'.²⁶⁰ Hunt also lamented Burdett's lack of commitment to reform in the 1820s, remarking in 1829 'we used to hear gallant and bold speeches from our hon. representative, Sir F. Burdett, on the subject of reform without the House of Commons; but latterly we have heard no such speeches from him within'.²⁶¹

Burdett's acceptance of the 1832 Reform Act, his fierce condemnation of the Whigs in the 1830s and taking his seat as a Conservative member for North Wiltshire created the strong and lasting impression that Burdett was never genuinely committed to reform and permanently damaged his reputation as a reformer. Throughout the 1830s,

²⁵⁴ *Cobbett's Weekly Political Register*, 26 July 1826.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 12 August 1826.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁷ Huish, *Cobbett*, Volume II, p. 390.

²⁵⁸ *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, Volume XXI (London, 1827), p. 759.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, Volume XXVII (London, 1830), p. 641.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁶¹ *The Times*, 26 May 1829.

and particularly after 1837, Burdett was regularly denounced for turning his back on reform and having ‘shamefully abandoned’²⁶² his former allies. In 1836 it was noted that ‘the Sir Francis Burdett of 1835, and the Sir Francis Burdett of 1815, than there is between light and darkness. He still makes a profession of Liberal principles, but it is only profession; the substance or reality is wanting’.²⁶³ A verse of June 1837 entitled *A Radical Summons* declared ‘Burdett turns his back on us’.²⁶⁴ In July 1837 Burdett was labelled a ‘Pseudo-reformer’²⁶⁵ and it was claimed that he was ‘now opposed to annual parliaments, the ballot, and universal suffrage’.²⁶⁶ A poem featured in *The Satirist* in the late 1830s condemned Burdett for abandoning reform and questioned whether his commitment to the cause had ever been genuine:

How he has lived, we know; nor shall we blame;
 But has he played the hypocrite for fame?
 Have all his struggles for the people’s good,
 His daring stand when tyrants shed their blood,
 Been but the trick to gain the mob’s applause, -
 Effect the aim, no matter what the cause?
 Shame on the men, who ’mid this factious storm,
 Would keep BURDETT to strangle all reform!
 Whose last acts give, - the fact who dares deny?
 To all his former honesty - the lie!²⁶⁷

As his reputation as a reformer came into question, Burdett’s credentials as a politician also came under fire. He was often accused of having being the pawn of the Radicals in the 1800s and 1810s, for example, in 1839 it was claimed that Burdett was ‘the puppet’ of the Radicals, who sat in the House of Commons to ‘repeat their

²⁶² Hulme, T., *Hulme’s Journal of a Tour in the Western Countries of America - September 30 1818-August 8 1819* (Massachusetts, 1828), p. 28.

²⁶³ Grant, J., *Random Recollections of the House of Commons, From the Year 1830 to the Close of 1835, Including Personal Sketches of the Leading Members of all Parties by one of No Party* (London, 1836), p. 242.

²⁶⁴ *Fraser’s Magazine for Town and Country*, Volume XV (London, 1837), p. 715.

²⁶⁵ *Tait’s Edinburgh Magazine for 1837*, New Series, Volume V (Edinburgh, 1837), p. 402.

²⁶⁶ *The Monthly Magazine of Politics, Literature, Art, Science and the Belles Lettres*, New Series, Volume XXIV (London, 1837), p. 97.

²⁶⁷ Bod., Burdett-Coutts Papers, MSS 39461, folio 1. See Appendix 11.

speeches and to present their remonstrances'.²⁶⁸ It was also claimed that 'Upon great occasions - upon show days - when he made motions for annual parliaments and universal suffrage, his speech was written for him'.²⁶⁹ He was a 'figure-head' of the movement and nothing more.²⁷⁰ It was a popular belief at the time that Cobbett wrote his speeches for him.²⁷¹ In 1837 it was remarked that Burdett would be remembered for 'the power which, prompted by those able men, Horne Tooke and Cobbett, he wielded over the populace, than for any traces of superior talent in his speeches in parliament, or for any evidence of ability as a politician or legislator'.²⁷² These ideas were encouraged by Cobbett's claims that Burdett was cast aside by the radical reformers in the late 1810s because he ceased to be of use because he had

*no influence, no weight of character more than a common man. He is unable to give me any support of aid. I can derive no assistance from his mere name or countenance, I can gain no weight of character; no power to do good by the mere circumstance of intimate co-operation with him.*²⁷³

This later perception of Burdett, as a deserter of the cause of reform is a powerful one and has had a significant impact upon the perception of him in the later years of his life and since his death. Hobhouse, for example, complained that eulogies of Burdett which appeared in the newspapers after his death in January 1844 'did not appreciate properly his talents as a parliamentary orator, nor his former importance'.²⁷⁴ Many works on the early nineteenth-century reform movement have undoubtedly been influenced by the idea that Burdett was never a genuine reformer and by the notion that Burdett's contribution to the reform movement was insignificant.²⁷⁵

What is clear, however, is that during his lifetime, and immediately after his death, Burdett was acknowledged as an important reformer and, despite the damage caused to his reputation as a result of his co-operation with moderate reformers, he continued

²⁶⁸ Grant, J., *St. Stephens; or Pencilings of Politicians by Mask* (London, 1839), p. 216.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 217.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 221.

²⁷² Cooke, G. W., *The History of Party; from the rise of the Whig and Tory factions in the reign of Charles II to the passing of the Reform Bill, Volume III, 1762-1832*, London, 1837, p. 447-8.

²⁷³ Huish, *Cobbett*, Volume I, p. 305.

²⁷⁴ *Broughton's Recollections*, Volume VI, p. 86.

to be viewed as a significant player in the parliamentary reform campaign. Bamford, for example, described Burdett as 'one of our idols'.²⁷⁶ In March 1831 Thomas Hardy, founder of the London Corresponding Society, wrote to Burdett,

I congratulate you on the pleasing prospect before us which I hope we shall before long fully enjoy, that Great National Blessing a Parliamentary Reform which your great talents years ago were often exerted to obtain. Although not then successful, yet your efforts were not lost, for you then sowed abundance of good seed which has been springing up ever since and which I hope will now produce a plentiful harvest for the benefit of your fellow countrymen.²⁷⁷

In October 1831, at a public meeting in Royston, Lancashire, a resolution was passed for a vote of thanks to Burdett 'for your effective services in the cause of Parliamentary Reform'.²⁷⁸ Even after his acceptance of the 1832 Reform Act, his estrangement from the Whigs and his movement towards conservatism, Burdett's contribution to reform continued to be acknowledged. For example, in 1834 it was claimed 'if there is any individual who, from his influence upon the minds of the British Parliament, and of the British people, deserves the title of the father of reform, we do not hesitate to say that that individual is Sir Francis Burdett'.²⁷⁹ Even Daniel O'Connell, with whom Burdett was at loggerheads in the 1830s, acknowledged the 'services of Sir Francis Burdett for nearly 30 long years in the cause of reform',²⁸⁰ and claimed that much of the success of reform was owed to Burdett. He also noted that the support of a man of Burdett's social rank 'gave a countenance to the cause of reform most important at its time of greatest depression'.²⁸¹ William Johnson Fox, editor of *The Monthly Repository* claimed that

For years [Burdett] was the cause of reform, and his hand alone upheld the banner around which only rallied the men of Westminster. Thousands of us there are who should never have been what we are, but

²⁷⁵ See Chapter 4.

²⁷⁶ Bamford, *Passages*, p. 24.

²⁷⁷ Hardy, T., *Memoir by Thomas Hardy*, BL, Add. 65153 B. Thomas Hardy to Burdett, 7 March 1831.

²⁷⁸ Bod., MSS 39454, Burdett-Coutts Papers, folio 85. William Fitton to Burdett, 3 October 1831.

²⁷⁹ Jerden, W., *National Portrait Gallery of Illustrious and Eminent Personages of the Nineteenth Century; with Memoirs* (5 Vols., London, 1834), Volume V, p. 7.

²⁸⁰ *The Times*, 4 January 1836.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*

for the intensity with which he concentrated all the rays of patriotic feeling upon the single essential point of Parliamentary Reform.²⁸²

Burdett certainly did a great deal to raise the profile of reform. Many of his actions ensured that the issue remained on the political agenda, even when those in parliament were keen to ignore it, and he took advantage of every opportunity to call for reform in the House of Commons and when speaking publicly. His 'position in the reform calendar cannot be overlooked'²⁸³ and he 'ought not to be omitted in the list of the few who advocated the cause in its days of peril'.²⁸⁴

IV

In his early career Burdett can be termed a 'radical' reformer as he supported reform during a period when it was dangerous to hold such views, and associated with men viewed with suspicion by the government. He was seen as a demagogue and rabble-rouser and became a focus for the radical extra-parliamentary reformers and the radical Whigs. But his movement away from the radical reformers in the late 1810s, his seeming abandonment of reform in the 1820s, his co-operation with moderate reformers in the early 1830s and the conservatism of his later years has greatly influenced Burdett's legacy as a reformer, creating the impression that Burdett was inconsistent over parliamentary reform and in his later years became a 'reactionary'. However, Burdett's opinions on reform did not change. His primary objective was to eliminate corruption from parliament. Universal suffrage and annual parliaments represented to Burdett an ideal, and he never withdrew his support for them, but he doubted their viability in the current political climate and was prepared to accept reform that offered less as long as it was consistent with his overall aims, hence his satisfaction with the 1832 Reform Act. He changed his tactics but not his objectives. Burdett was an important and significant player in the reform movement. Throughout the 1810s he acted as the head of the extra-parliamentary reform movement, and the radical reform group within the Commons. His role as an

²⁸² *The Monthly Repository of Theology and General Literature*, 2 January 1836.

²⁸³ *The Black Book: An Exposition of Abuses in Church and State, Courts of Law, Municipal Corporations, and Public Companies; with a Precis of the House of Commons, Past, Present, and to Come* (London, 1835), p. 59-60.

²⁸⁴ *The Monthly Repository of Theology and General Literature*, 1 October 1837.

intermediary between reformers in and out of parliament was vital in the co-ordination of the wider reform movement. In the early 1830s Burdett also played an important role in restraining the more radical elements within the Commons, encouraging them to support the more moderate reform offered by the Whigs.

Chapter 3 Appendices

Appendix 1

S. de Wilde, *A Second Sight View of the Blessings of Radical Reform*, 1 May 1809



BMS 11328

Appendix 2

S. de Wilde, *The Reformers Dinner*, 1 June 1809



The Reformers Dinner
Published for the National Society, 178, Strand, London, 1809

BMS 11335

Appendix 4

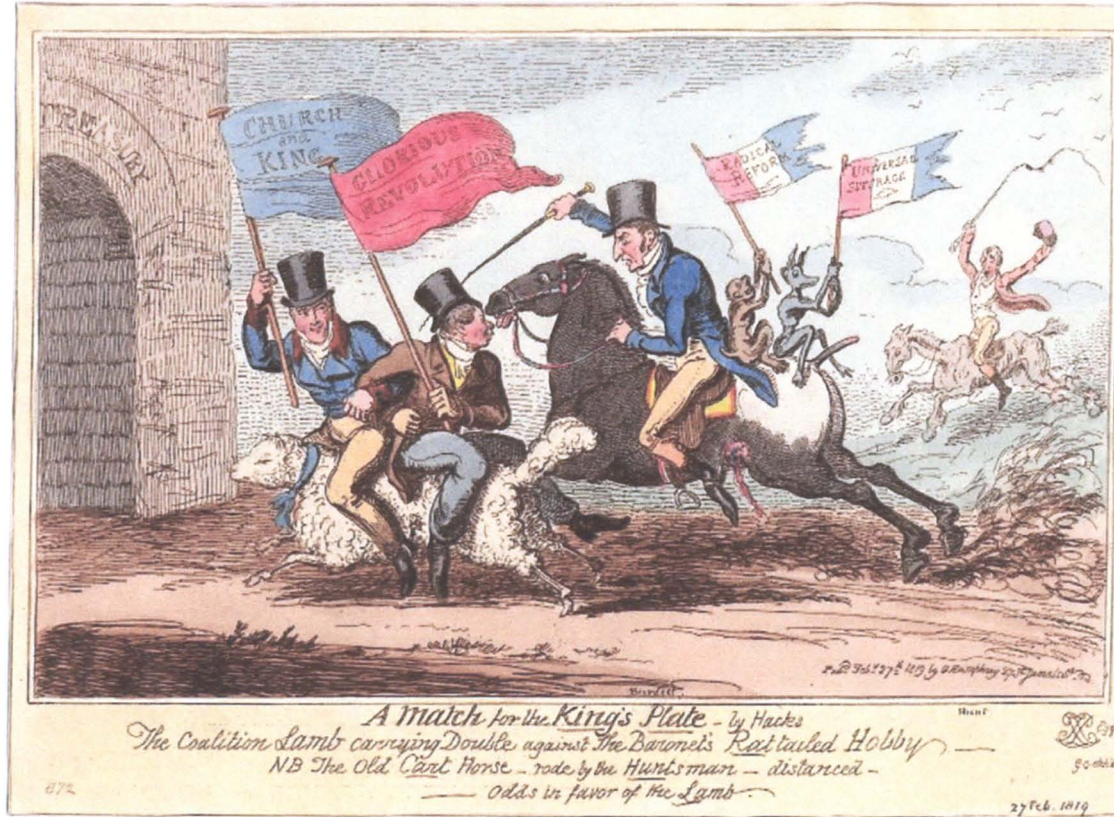
G. Cruikshank, *National Phrenzy or John Bull and his Doctors*, 1 December 1813



BMS 12110

Appendix 5

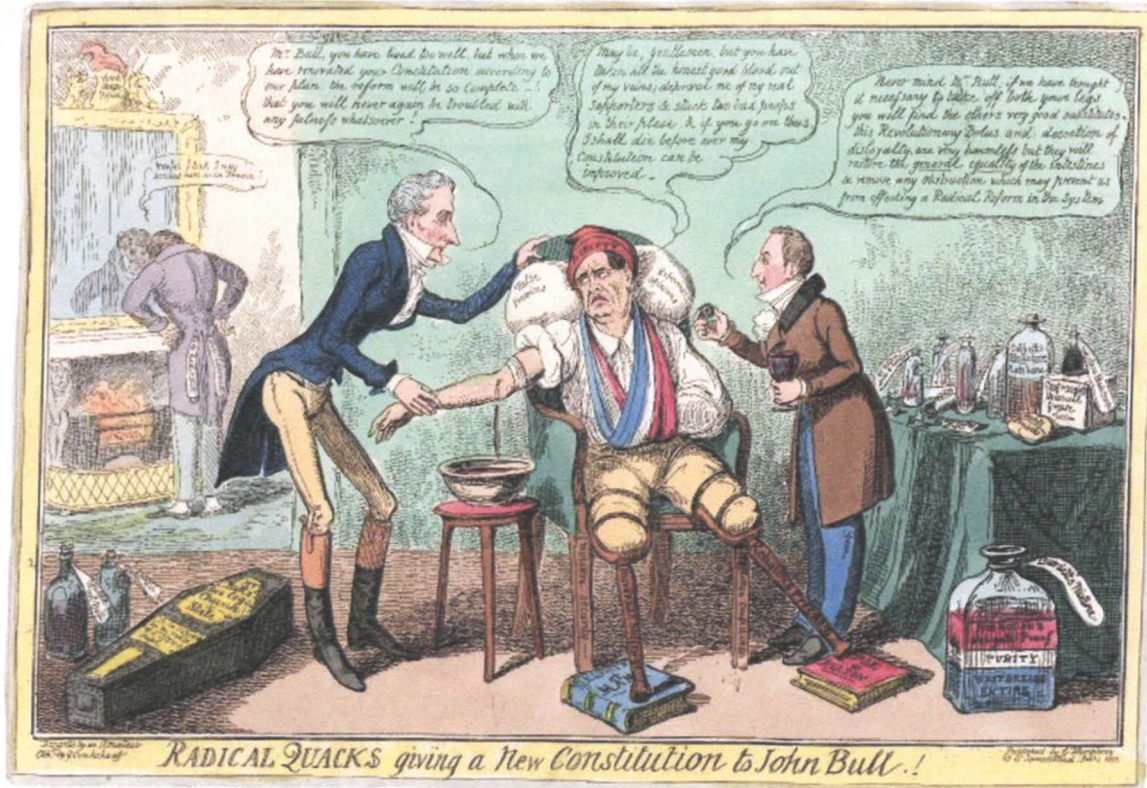
G. Cruikshank, *A Match for the King's Plate - By Hacks - The Coalition Lamb carrying Double against the Baronet's Rat Tailed Hobby*, 27 February 1819



BMS 13204

Appendix 6

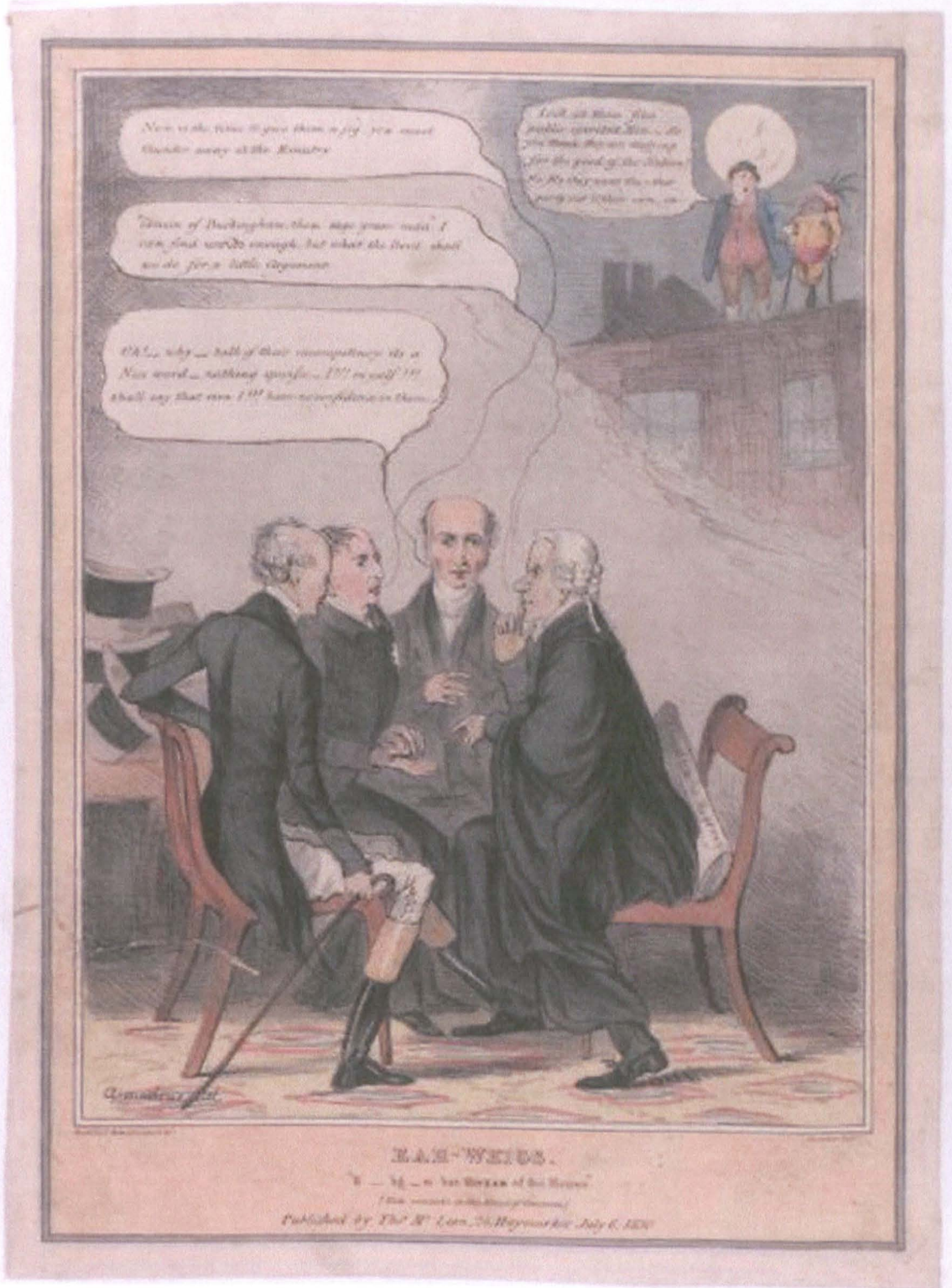
G. Cruikshank, *Radical Quacks giving a New Constitution to John Bull*, 4 February 1821



BMS 13714

Appendix 8

R. Seymour, *Ear-whigs*, 6 July 1830



Bod., John Johnson Political and Satirical Prints Collection, Political Cartoons 3 (39)

Appendix 9

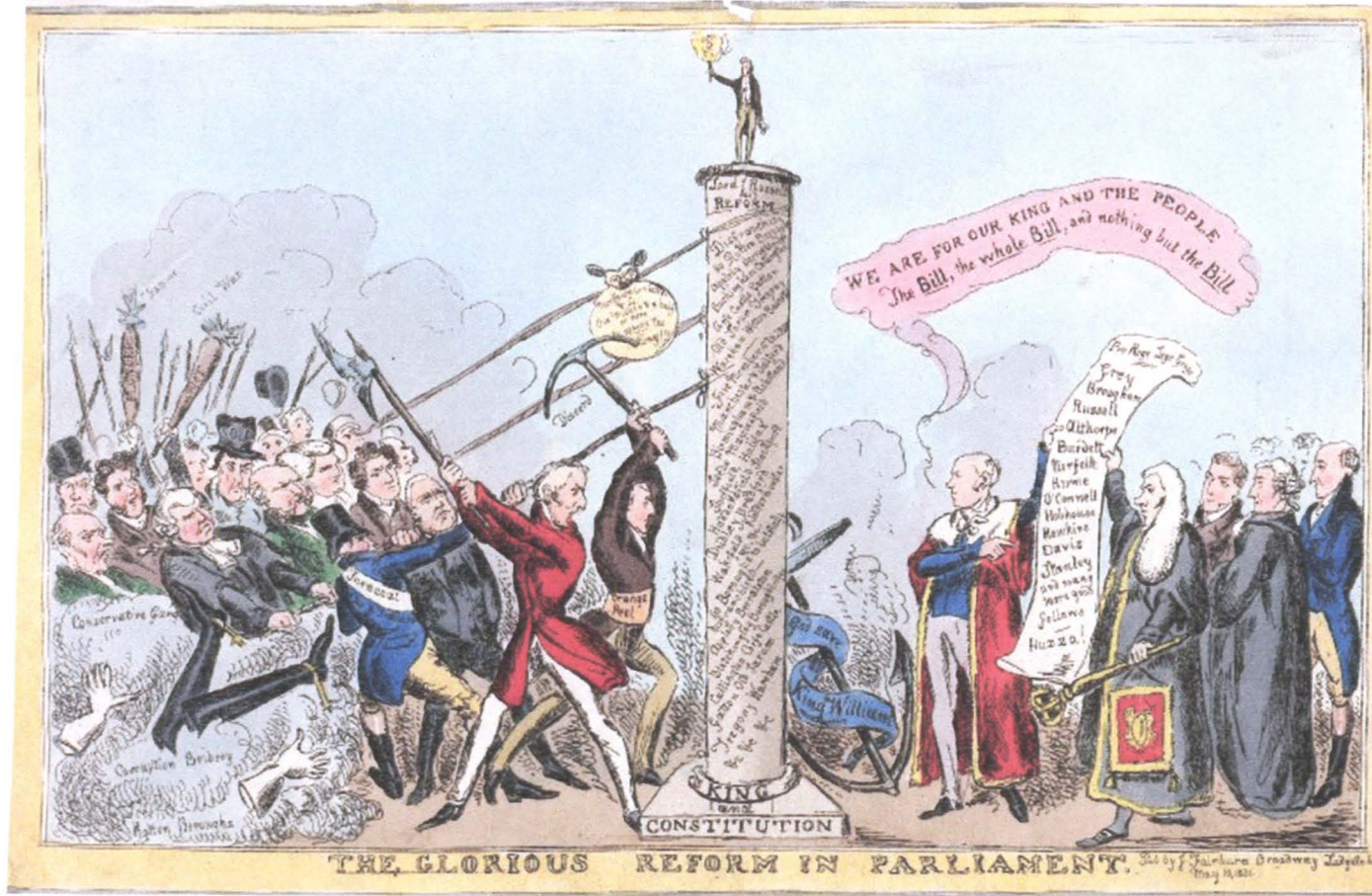
The Reformers Attack on the Old Rotten Trees; or the Foul Nests of the Cormorants in Danger, c. April 1831



BMS 16650

Appendix 10

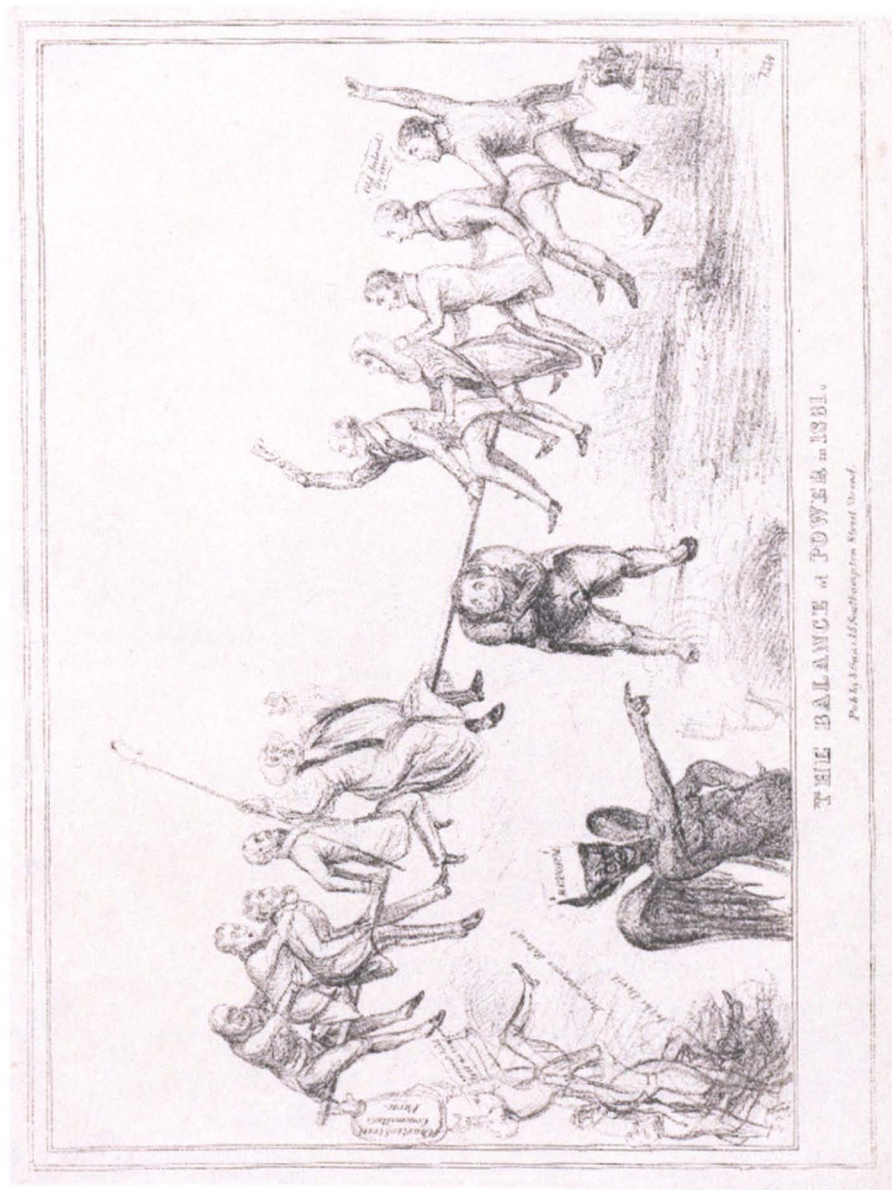
I. Cruikshank, *The Glorious Reform in Parliament*, 10 May 1831



BMS 16677

Appendix 11

The Balance of Power in 1831, May 1831



BMS 11680

Appendix 12

Reform, 1 January 1832



BMS 16924

Appendix 13

A Memento of the Great Public Question of Reform, 15 April 1832



A MEMENTO OF THE GREAT PUBLIC QUESTION OF REFORM.
1. THE KING & DUKE OF SUSSEX LORDS 3. JOHN RUSSELL 4. GREY 5. AUTHORPE 6. BRIDGMAN 7. LANSDOVNE 8. ROLLAND 9. SOLEBURY.
10. OSSELL 11. HUME DE STANLEY.
1. DUKE OF CUMBERLAND 2. WYLLINGTON 3. LILGON 4. WETHERILL 5. CROKER.
Designed and Engraved exclusively for the Pall Mall Weekly Messenger and delivered gratis April 15, 1832.

BMS 16924

Appendix 14

A poem from *The Satirist* in the late 1830s (probably 1837)

Have ye not seen the oak, whose stately form
Would brave the lightning, and defy the storm?
The winds tear up the meaner trunks around,
The oak unbent maintains its rooted ground.
But age, the canker, eats its hardy core,
And hollow is that trunk, so firm before.
It wastes in rottenness, and nought can stay
The monarch of the woods from sad decay.
So ye have seen the patriot in his youth,
When all was fervour, eloquence, and truth;
You saw him dauntless fight in freedom's field,
Too proud to beg, too valorous to yield;
Resolved to stem the pressure of the throne
E'en to the last, although he stood alone.
Him then the terrors of a tyrant's will, -
Him then the plottings of a statesman's skill, -
Him then the tempting bribe of countless gold,
Ne'er scared, or tripp'd, allured once from his hold.
Secure he stood, all fear, craft, charm above,
Oppression's foe, based on his constant love.

But now the vigour of those noble days
Fades like the sunbeams through the twilight haze;
And scarce a glimmer now illumines the scene,
To tell where once that glorious light has been.
His strength of mind and singleness of soul,
Now gently sink beneath the Court's controul;
And he becomes a wither'd pliant thing,
Begging the smiles and pleasure of a King.
Still lurks a morbid appetite for fame,
But honesty no longer stamps his name.
BURDETT can now but this example show,
How high a man may be, - alas! how low.
Could such a patriot ever turn his coat,
Or e'er be doubtful how to yield his vote?
This way the thirst for honours make him rat,
While fear of shame still makes him turn to *that*.
Yet what at such a time could dotage do?
For what is shame, a peerage in his view?
Why should he care if character be lost?
'Twas surely vended at a noble cost!
What are the people balanced in the scale?
Against the Court can turbulence prevail?
But then his seat, which through his chequer'd life
He has retained in spite of courtly strife,
Must be resigned if he should dare oppose

The people's struggle with their hated foes.
BURDETT still wished to rise, yet feared to fall -
So 'twixt the two he would not vote at all.

Is he the statesman for this awful time,
When even Tories think Reform no crime
Shall he the people with caprice befool,
A quondam patriot, now a truckling tool?
Now grey in years, his wisdom quite outgrown,
He seeks new knowledge, spurning what is known.
As some old pamper'd fool, his passion's slave,
Becomes a lover stepping to his grave,
He seeks the pastime of a Royal Court,
Mumbling his mirth and hobbling in his sport.
'Tis thus with water, ere it is congealed,
That all its latent heat becomes revealed;
The human frame, ere all its pow'rs are cold,
Will warmth of passion suddenly unfold.

How he has lived, we know; nor shall we blame;
But has he played the hypocrite for fame?
Have all his struggles for the people's good,
His daring stand when tyrants shed their blood,
Been but the trick to gain the mob's applause, -
Effect the aim, no matter what the cause?
Shame on the men, who 'mid this factious storm,
Would keep BURDETT to strangle all reform!
Whose last acts give, - the fact who dares deny?
To all his former honesty - the lie!

Bod., 39461, Burdett-Coutts Papers, folio 1.

Chapter 4

Reputations: Burdett and the Historians

In historical works on the nineteenth century, Burdett has been the subject of much comment and varying opinion, but very little real study. In many works he has been marginalised and sidelined. His credentials as a parliamentary reformer have been questioned and his contribution to the reform movement dismissed. Burdett's significant involvement in Irish politics throughout his career, particularly his involvement with Irish revolutionaries between 1796 and 1802 and his significant contribution to the Catholic Emancipation campaign, has also been either underestimated or relatively ignored. This misunderstanding of Burdett and his achievements is due to a number of factors. Burdett's reputation is contested because he cannot easily be categorised and does not fit within the labels that historians of the nineteenth century tend to apply to politicians of the age, namely 'Whig', 'Tory', 'Radical', and 'Reformer'. Burdett arguably could sit in all four categories, leading to a great deal of confusion about the true nature of his political ideology. Furthermore, Burdett never held political office, nor did any parliamentary acts have his name attached to them, making his contribution to nineteenth century politics seem minor and insignificant. Lastly, Burdett has been the victim of historiographical fashion. As historical works from the 1960s onwards began to focus on northern working class radicalism, metropolitan upper class radicals like Burdett were disregarded.

This chapter looks at Burdett's reputation since his death, and how he and his ideas have been portrayed in historical works on the nineteenth century. The first section analyses how historical works have presented Burdett, particularly with regards to his contribution to the reform movement, his involvement with Irish revolutionaries in his early career and his role in the campaign for Catholic Emancipation. The second section establishes the reasons why Burdett has been perceived in such a way, and why his career has been the subject of much comment but relatively little study.

I

Although Burdett is recognised as a 'reformer',¹ many historians regard Burdett's role in the reform movement as minor and insignificant. He is seen as a mere figurehead,² a weak reformer and a mock-reformer, with little contribution to make to the reform movement in terms of direction, leadership and talent. Carless Davis, for example, has described Burdett as a 'a dull man'³ and the 'nominal leader of the Hampden Clubs'.⁴ He claimed that Burdett and Lord Thomas Cochrane, Westminster's other MP, were 'simply the figureheads of a movement about which they knew very little'.⁵ In many works on the nineteenth century Burdett's achievements and talents are played down. Halévy, despite some recognition of Burdett's role in the reform movement in terms of presenting the motions in the House of Commons and his involvement with the Hampden Club, gave an overall negative impression of Burdett as a reformer, claiming that he 'achieved nothing, and even outside the House his efforts were scarcely better supported'.⁶ He also claimed that by the time reform became a popular issue in the late 1810s Burdett was 'no longer in control of the movement'.⁷ Butler described Burdett as having 'a heart of gold but a head of feathers' and claimed that he was the subject of 'general ridicule' over the incident involving his son being found reading the Magna Carta when

¹ See Butler, J. R. M., *The Passing of the Great Reform Bill* (London, 1914), p. 176; Briggs, A., *The Age of Improvement, 1783-1867* (London, 1959), p. 179; Sambrook, J., *William Cobbett* (London, 1973), p. 72; Thomis, M. I., and Holt, P., *Threats of Revolution in Britain 1789-1848* (London, 1977), pp. 36 and 38; Hill, B. W., *British Parliamentary Parties 1742-1832: From the Fall of Walpole to the First Reform Act* (London, 1985), p. 181; MacDonagh, O., *The Hereditary Bondsman: Daniel O'Connell 1775-1829*, (London, 1988), p. 305; Conner, C. D., *Colonel Despard: The Life and Times of an Anglo-Irish Rebel* (Pennsylvania, 2000), p. 193; Derriman, J., *Marooned: The Story of a Cornish Seaman* (2nd ed., Leominster, 2006), p. 74. Clark describes Burdett as a 'populist reformer' (Clark, J. C. D., *English Society 1660-1832: Religion, Ideology and Politics during the Ancien Regime* (2nd ed., Cambridge, 2000), p. 443).

² See Roberts, M., 'Leigh Hunt's Place in the Reform Movement, 1808-1810', *The Review of English Studies* 11 (January 1935), p. 58; Harvey, A. D., *Britain in the Early Nineteenth Century* (London, 1978), p. 223; and Stevenson, J., *Popular Disturbances in England 1700-1870* (London, 1979), p. 185.

³ Carless Davis, H. W., *The Age of Grey and Peel* (Oxford, 1929), p. 203.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

⁶ Halévy, E., *A History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century, Volume II: The Liberal Awakening, 1815-1830* (2nd ed., London, 1949), p. 12.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

officers came to arrest him in 1810, remarking that Burdett 'was sometimes no better received by the Radical meetings at which his tall, graceful, aristocratic figure looked strangely incongruous'.⁸ E. P. Thompson described Burdett as 'a weak reform leader in the House'⁹ and 'scarcely a reformer of the calibre to provide national leadership'.¹⁰ Burdett has also been accused of losing interest in reform by the mid-1810s¹¹ and has been criticised for 'presenting a reformist front' when in reality he was 'increasingly equivocal - rejecting, for instance the idea of universal suffrage'.¹² White accused Burdett of regularly deserting the reform cause to go hunting, as does Thomas.¹³

The negative impression of Burdett is particularly common in works written during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. Harvey, for example, is extremely dismissive of Burdett, describing him as a 'stiff, handsome and aloof patrician neither especially talented nor well-informed'.¹⁴ He claimed Burdett had 'few ideas of his own' and 'gave little in terms of ideology or inspiration'.¹⁵ Thomas has argued that Burdett's reputation has been over inflated, that his popularity and electoral success was the result of a few high profile events in his career, such as his imprisonment in 1810, not because of his radical stance.¹⁶ He characterised Burdett as arrogant and 'aloof ... so certain of his following in Westminster that he could afford to ration his appearances there',¹⁷ and presented Burdett's ideas as being out of touch and irrelevant, remarking 'the growth of an urban consciousness in radical politics made his agrarian outlook more and more archaic'.¹⁸ Cannon claimed that Burdett's 1809 reform proposal 'relied upon Tierney's work of 1793' and remarks that 'it was left to W. A. Madocks to rescue the

⁸ Butler, *Great Reform Bill*, p. 25.

⁹ Thompson, E. P., *The Making of the English Working Class* (London, 1963), p. 499.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 498.

¹¹ Osborne, J. W., *John Cartwright* (London, 1972), p. 74.

¹² Hemmings, R., *Liberty or Death: Early Struggles for Parliamentary Democracy* (London, 2000), p. 153.

¹³ White, R. J., *Waterloo to Peterloo* (London, 1957), p. 127; and Thomas, W., *The Philosophic Radicals: Nine Studies in Theory and Practice, 1817-1841* (Oxford, 1979), p. 87.

¹⁴ Harvey, *Britain in the Early Nineteenth Century*, p. 222.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 223.

¹⁶ Thomas, *Philosophic Radicals*, p. 59.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

motion with a forceful supporting speech'.¹⁹ Belchem was particularly critical of Burdett's reform credentials, accusing him of supporting popular causes, such as Peterloo and the Queen Caroline Affair, in order to increase his radical credibility and popularity.²⁰ This idea has also been forwarded by White, who seemed to suggest that Burdett's condemnation of the Peterloo Massacre was a calculated move to increase his popularity and present himself as a martyr.²¹ Belchem condemned Burdett as a 'shoy-hoy reformer'²² and believed that he introduced a reform motion favourable to universal suffrage in 1818 'simply to regain some of his lost popular appeal and reform credentials as the general election of 1818 approached'.²³ Royle and Walvin also believe this to be the case, remarking that Burdett's 1818 proposal was drafted with 'the forthcoming election in mind'.²⁴ They have also criticised Burdett for being 'rich ... proud, unpredictable and disdainful',²⁵ and claimed that Burdett and Cochrane were 'rather dubious parliamentary champions'.²⁶ Burdett's support of the Disenfranchisement Bill of 1825 is regarded as demonstrating 'the shallowness of Burdett's radicalism',²⁷ and his willingness to support ministers in the months leading up to the passage of the Reform Bill has been regarded as 'a sign of his failing interest in reform'.²⁸

There has, however, been some recognition of Burdett's important role in the radical reform movement. Dinwiddy, for example, has claimed that Burdett was 'much more than a figurehead'²⁹ of the reform movement, as his speeches and addresses were widely publicised and gave publicity to the movement. Marchand also acknowledged

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

¹⁹ Cannon, J., *Parliamentary Reform 1640-1832* (Cambridge, 1973), p. 156.

²⁰ Belchem, J., *'Orator' Hunt: Henry Hunt and English Working-Class Radicalism* (Oxford, 1985), p. 141-2.

²¹ White, *Waterloo to Peterloo*, p. 188.

²² Belchem, *'Orator' Hunt*, p. 141.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

²⁴ Royle, E., and Walvin, J., *English Radicals and Reformers 1760-1848* (Brighton, 1982), p. 117.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

²⁸ Rowe, D. J., 'Class and Political Radicalism in London, 1831-2', *HJ* 13, 1 (March 1970), p. 38.

²⁹ Dinwiddy, J. R., *Radicalism and Reform in Britain, 1780-1850* (London, 1992), p. 123.

Burdett as 'a leader of reform'.³⁰ Steiner has claimed that Burdett (together with Cartwright and Cobbett) was one of the 'principal radicals of the years 1800-1815'.³¹ Hendrix has claimed that Burdett was 'the chief parliamentary champion of reform',³² and Walker has similarly remarked that in the late 1810s Burdett was 'the strongest supporter of Reform at the time in Parliament'.³³ Archer has remarked that

the moderate and popular strand of radicalism owed much to the charismatic leadership of individuals such as Burdett Burdett has been credited with keeping alive the spirit of parliamentary reform through the war years in London and even further afield The 'mass platform' of constitutional radicalism owes more to him than does the insurrectionary strand.³⁴

Hill claimed that Burdett's election to Middlesex in 1802 was 'a signal of revived radicalism'³⁵ and has hailed Burdett as 'the hero of Radical opinion outdoors'.³⁶

Brock has recognised Burdett as 'one of the foremost parliamentary advocates of a radical Reform'.³⁷ Cahill has also asserted that Burdett was 'the leading English political reformer in the movements that culminated in the passing of Catholic emancipation and the Reform Act of 1832'.³⁸

Many historians, even those that have been critical of Burdett, have also claimed that Burdett emerged as a leader of the radical reform movement in 1806/7 and that his election to Westminster in 1807 helped to revive the reform movement.³⁹ Royle and

³⁰ Marchand, L. A. (ed.), *Byron's Letters and Journals* (13 Vols., London, 1973-94), Volume I, p. 186n.

³¹ Steiner, E. E., 'Separating the Soldier from the Citizen: Ideology and Criticism of Corporal Punishment in the British Armies, 1790-1815', *Social History* 8 (January 1983), p. 29.

³² Hendrix, R., 'Popular Humour and "The Black Dwarf"', *JBS* 16 (Autumn 1976), p. 111.

³³ Walker, A. S., 'Peterloo, Shelley and Reform', *PMLA* 40 (March 1925), p. 152.

³⁴ Archer, J. E., *Social Unrest and Popular Protest in England 1780-1840* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 67.

³⁵ Hill, *British Parliamentary Parties*, p. 181.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

³⁷ Brock, M., *The Great Reform Act* (London, 1973), p. 46.

³⁸ Cahill, G., 'Burdett, Sir Francis (1770-1844) in Baylen, J. O., and Gossman, N. J. (eds.), *Biographical Dictionary of Modern British Radicals. Volume I: 1770-1830* (Sussex, 1979), p. 68.

³⁹ See Hemmings, *op. cit.*, p. 153. Cameron has claimed that Burdett was 'the leader of the 1809 revival of the [reform] movement' (Cameron, K. N., 'Shelley and the Reformers', *ELH* 12 (March 1945), p. 65.) Claeys has also remarked that Burdett's election to Westminster 'led the post-war radical

Walvin, for example, have claimed that 1806-7 was a turning point for the reform movement and that Burdett's election to Westminster was a significant contributory factor. They remarked that during this period 'Burdett emerged as the leading representative of popular radicalism in the Commons'.⁴⁰ Cannon described Burdett as the 'leader' of the reform movement from 1806 onwards.⁴¹ Thomis and Holt have also acknowledged that Burdett was one of the 'national leaders of the reform movement'⁴² and believed that his election to Westminster 'helped to revive interest [in reform] elsewhere'.⁴³ Rude claimed that Burdett's election was 'a decisive breakthrough for the Radicals'.⁴⁴ Briggs believed that 'It was Burdett more than any other single person who revived the fashion [for reform]'.⁴⁵ The Bewleys have claimed that Burdett 'was not a politician of the first order, but during the war and for some years afterwards he was the leading radical spokesman and attracted a following of considerable strength'.⁴⁶ Burdett's critics have also been obliged to recognise that his role was in some way significant. Butler, for example, despite his dismissive attitude towards Burdett does allude to his important role in the passage of reform, claiming that the nature of the first Reform Bill was kept secret in order to give it the best chance of success, 'nothing was known outside the circle of a few, such as Burdett, whose criticism they thought it wise to forestall'.⁴⁷ He also recognises Burdett's role as a mediator between the government and the extra-parliamentary radicals,⁴⁸ being one of the few historians to do so. E. P. Thompson admitted that Burdett was 'one of the only national spokesman of reform capable of being heard at all',⁴⁹ and Thomas, despite his fierce criticism of Burdett, acknowledged him (along

revival' (Claeys, G., 'Whigs, Liberals and Radicals', *HJ* 33 (September 1990), p. 741).

⁴⁰ Royle, and Walvin, *English Radicals and Reformers*, p. 94.

⁴¹ Cannon, *Parliamentary Reform*, p. 151.

⁴² Thomis and Holt, *Threats of Revolution*, p. 46.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁴⁴ Rudé, G., *Hanoverian London 1714-1808* (London, 1971), p. 250.

⁴⁵ Briggs, *Age of Improvement*, p. 179.

⁴⁶ Bewley, C. and D., *Gentlemen Radical: A Life of John Horne Tooke, 1736-1812* (London, 1998), p. 278.

⁴⁷ Butler, *Great Reform Bill*, p. 191.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 265.

⁴⁹ Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, p. 499.

with Cobbett) as one of 'the twin pillars of the radical movement'.⁵⁰ However, this is relatively faint praise and does not fully recognise Burdett's importance. As has been discussed, Burdett's talents and contribution have often been minimised. Rowe, for example suggests that Burdett was only selected as chairman of the National Political Union in 1831 'because of his past connexion with reform'.⁵¹

Another problem with works that do address Burdett's contribution to reform is that they tend to focus on the period from 1807, the year of Burdett's election to Westminster, up to the late 1810s, when his relationships with Hunt, Cobbett and Cartwright had broken down. Few works examine in any depth Burdett's continuing commitment to reform and his unique position as an intermediary between the parliamentary and extra-parliamentary supporters of reform in the early 1830s. In many of the works that do mention Burdett there is very little discussion of his politics, ideas and beliefs. There is no sense of who he was as a man or a politician and little indication of what he wanted to achieve from reform, or what type of reform he actually advocated. Burdett is often mentioned only briefly or in passing, with many general works on the nineteenth century omitting him altogether. For example Woodward's *The Age of Reform, 1815-1870* (Oxford, 1938) contains just one casual reference to Burdett in its section on prison reform. Thomson's *England in the Nineteenth Century, 1815-1914* (London, 1950) also contains only one reference to Burdett as one of the leaders of the radical movement (along with Hunt and Cartwright), but contains no further discussion of his contribution to the movement. Evans's *The Forging of the Modern State: Early Industrial Britain 1783-1870* (London, 1983), which contains two sections of radicalism and reform, one covering the period 1789 to 1803 and the other 1815 to 1820, does not contain any mention of Burdett. Bentley's *Politics Without Democracy: Great Britain, 1815-1914. Perception and Preoccupation in British Government* (Oxford, 1984) also has little to say about Burdett as a reformer, remarking only that he was 'disturbed by reform in

⁵⁰ Thomas, *Philosophic Radicals*, p. 57.

⁵¹ Rowe, 'Class and Political Radicalism in London', p. 38.

1832 and turned Tory'.⁵² McCord and Perdue's *British History 1815-1914* (2nd ed., Oxford, 2007) also contains very few references to Burdett, remarking only that he was 'one of the most radical politicians'⁵³ and, along with Cartwright, Cobbett and Hunt, was one of the 'leading radicals with established national reputations'.⁵⁴

The extent of Burdett's involvement with Irish revolutionaries between 1796 and 1802 and its substantial impact on his career is also something that historians have overlooked. Bonwick, for example, remarked that Burdett 'did not especially concern himself with Irish affairs until about 1817',⁵⁵ and Jackson's work on Burdett does not recognise the significant role that Irish politics played in Burdett's early career.⁵⁶ Those that do discuss Burdett's association with O'Connor and Despard have failed to agree upon and have difficulty in defining Burdett's involvement. The intimacy and intensity of his friendship with Arthur O'Connor is often acknowledged. Burdett is described by Elliott, Tillyard and Hodlin as being 'infatuated'⁵⁷ with O'Connor. MacDermot also describes Burdett as being 'fascinated by O'Connor' and claims that he 'fell under his ascendancy and hero-worshipped him devotedly for some ten years'.⁵⁸ A similar view was expressed by a contemporary of Burdett, the Catholic lawyer and historian Francis Plowden, who claimed that Arthur O'Connor 'egregiously and basely ... duped sir Francis Burdett' with his 'appearance of the most constitutional loyalty'.⁵⁹ Consequently Burdett, 'in the unsuspecting generosity of his soul ... boastingly pledged himself for the purest loyalty of his base and false

⁵² Bentley, M., *Politics Without Democracy: Great Britain, 1815-1914. Perception and Preoccupation in British Government* (Oxford, 1984), p. 374.

⁵³ McCord, N., and Perdue, B., *British History 1815-1914* (2nd ed., Oxford, 2007), p. 20.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁵⁵ Bonwick, M. H. R., 'The Radicalism of Sir Francis Burdett (1770-1844) and Early Nineteenth-Century "Radicalisms"' (PhD, Cornell University, 1967), p. 13.

⁵⁶ See Jackson, J. S., 'The Public Career of Sir Francis Burdett: The Years of Radicalism, 1796-1815' (PhD, University of Philadelphia, 1932).

⁵⁷ Elliott, M., *Partners in Revolution: The United Irishmen and France* (New Haven, 1982), p. 100; Tillyard, *Citizen Lord: Edward Fitzgerald* (London, 1977), p. 314; and Hodlin, C. S., 'The Political Career of Sir Francis Burdett' (D. Phil., Oxford University, 1989), pp. 8 and 14. Tillyard also describes Burdett as Arthur O'Connor's 'admirer' (Tillyard, *Citizen Lord*, p. 314).

⁵⁸ MacDermot, 'Arthur O'Connor', *Irish Historical Studies* 15 (March 1966), p. 50.

⁵⁹ Plowden, F., *An Historical Review of the State of Ireland from the Invasion of that Country Under Henry II to its Union with Great Britain on the first of January 1801* (5 Vols., Philadelphia, 1806), Volume IV, p. 254 n.

friend'.⁶⁰ Burdett was certainly in awe of Arthur O'Connor in the period 1795 to 1798. Although they had first met in 1792, they did not form a close friendship until 1795, a time of great difficulty in Burdett's life. O'Connor and his radical politics offered him an interesting and exciting distraction from his misery. Burdett was politically inexperienced, particularly when it came to Irish affairs, and naturally would have deferred to his more experienced and knowledgeable friend. However, he was not completely overawed by O'Connor. Burdett valued his independence highly throughout his career and would not have agreed to do anything which he did not feel comfortable with.

Several historians believe that Burdett was in some way involved in O'Connor's schemes. Hilton, for example, claimed that 'Burdett had associated with United Irishmen before the 1798 rising and half expected to be indicted himself'.⁶¹ Hayter-Hames remarks that while Burdett might not have known 'exactly' what O'Connor's plans were, 'He knew enough ... to see that his friend's political opposition to government was becoming more radical and more militant'.⁶² O'Toole also believes that Burdett knew something of O'Connor's plots. He points out that O'Connor and Fitzgerald confided their plans to their Foxite associates, particularly Fox and Sheridan. For example, in December 1796 O'Connor wrote to Fox informing him of the inevitability of revolution. O'Toole claims that if O'Connor was sharing this information with Fox and Sheridan, he was almost certainly sharing it with Burdett, his 'closest friend among the opposition in England'.⁶³ O'Toole also remarks that Sheridan would have to have been 'extraordinarily dim-witted'⁶⁴ to have not understood O'Connor and Fitzgerald's intentions, particularly after the attempted French landing at Bantry Bay in December 1796. The same can be said of Burdett. It was extremely likely that he knew what was going on. Conner also believes this to be the case and, referring to O'Connor's own claims in his *Memoirs* that he and Burdett

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Hilton, B., *A Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People?: England 1783-1846* (Oxford, 2006), p. 207n.

⁶² Hayter-Hames, J., *Arthur O'Connor: United Irishman* (Cork, 2001), p. 132.

⁶³ O'Toole, F., *A Traitor's Kiss: The Life of Richard Brinsley Sheridan* (London, 1997), p. 319.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

were 'inseparable',⁶⁵ remarks 'That would imply that O'Connor kept Burdett fully informed of his revolutionary activities'.⁶⁶ MacDermot agrees and claims that Burdett, who 'knew O'Connor longest and most intimately',⁶⁷ was 'almost certainly privy to his treasonable intentions'.⁶⁸ Dinwiddy believes that Burdett 'narrowly escaped prosecution for his complicity in the schemes of the United Irishmen, and may actually have flirted with revolutionary groups in London'.⁶⁹ Yet, despite this recognition of Burdett's involvement, no one has discussed the impact of this involvement on the direction of Burdett's career.

Some historians express doubts over Burdett's involvement. The Bewleys reject the idea that Burdett knew what was going on, remarking that he was 'unaware that the government had documentary evidence to prove his [O'Connor's] guilt'.⁷⁰ Similarly, Tillyard claims that Burdett merely 'liked to think of himself as privy to the drama that followed [the rebellion]'.⁷¹ However, she contradicts this when she remarks that in December 1797 O'Connor 'spent several weeks [in London] caballing with a delighted Sir Francis Burdett ... and planning his journey to Paris'.⁷² Hodlin claims that there is 'absolutely no evidence to suggest that Burdett was in favour of, or would support any plans for a rebellion in Ireland. All the evidence points merely to a very close friendship with O'Connor'.⁷³ Although Hodlin is correct that there is no absolute proof of Burdett's involvement, she is wrong to claim there is 'no evidence' as there is a great deal to suggest that Burdett was in some way involved with O'Connor's plots. The government certainly thought his links to Irish revolutionaries was worthy of some attention. Hodlin regards Burdett's retreat from Irish revolutionary activity in the latter part of 1798 as evidence of his disapproval of the

⁶⁵ O'Connor, *Memoirs*, folio 4, p. 96.

⁶⁶ Conner, C. D., *Arthur O'Connor: The Most Important Irish Revolutionary You May Never Have Heard Of* (New York, 2009), p. 39.

⁶⁷ MacDermot, 'Arthur O'Connor', p. 59.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

⁶⁹ Dinwiddy, J. R., 'Sir Francis Burdett and Burdettite Radicalism', *History*, 65 (1980), p. 31.

⁷⁰ Bewley, *Gentlemen Radical*, p. 202.

⁷¹ Tillyard, *Citizen Lord*, p. 314.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 298.

⁷³ Hodlin, C. S., 'The Political Career of Sir Francis Burdett' (D. Phil., Oxford University, 1989), p. 14.

rebellion. Yet, this is more indicative of his regret at becoming involved and only suggests he disapproved after the event, it does not discredit the idea that he was in some way involved. It is hard to believe that Burdett would have remained on such intimate terms with O'Connor in this period had he been in any way opposed to his plans.

There is similar confusion over Burdett's role in the Despard conspiracy. Some place Burdett firmly at the centre of events. Hone, for example, claims that Burdett and Despard were together the day before the Colonel's arrest and that Burdett was keen for his name not to be mentioned at the trial.⁷⁴ Elliott also suggests Burdett might have been involved in the plot, claiming that many of the state prisoners released in 1801 who became involved in the conspiracy looked to Burdett for leadership advice and support.⁷⁵ Jay describes Burdett as 'the closest of Despard's colleagues in his ideology, and certainly the one who would be boldest in taking risks on his behalf'.⁷⁶ Patterson regards the Despard episode as the peak of Burdett's 'revolutionary fever',⁷⁷ which declined thereafter. Others, however, see Burdett as having a more marginal role. Conner, for example, acknowledges Burdett's association with the 1802 conspirators who 'appreciated the political support Burdett gave them' but claims that they did not look to him for leadership as 'they could not place their confidence in someone who was not a member of their organisation'.⁷⁸ Burdett certainly sympathised with Despard's plight, however, Jay's suggestion that their friendship was such that Burdett was willing to take personal risks for Despard is tenuous. They certainly knew each other, but if the two men were such intimate friends, why was Burdett not the first to raise Despard's case in the Commons? Why did he not comment on the case until after he had seen Despard for himself? Burdett's support for Despard is more likely the result of him defending someone who he believed was

⁷⁴ Hone, J. A., *For the Cause of Truth: Radicalism in London, 1796-1821* (Oxford, 1982), p. 113.

⁷⁵ Elliott (1982), *op. cit.*, p. 286.

⁷⁶ Jay, M., *The Unfortunate Colonel Despard: The Tragic True Story of the Last Man to be Condemned to be Hung, Drawn and Quartered* (London, 2004), p. 287.

⁷⁷ Patterson, *Burdett*, Volume I, p. 97.

⁷⁸ Conner, C.D., *Colonel Despard: The Life and Times of an Anglo-Irish Rebel* (Pennsylvania, 2000), p. 208-9.

being illegally imprisoned, it is not indicative of Burdett agreeing with Despard's politics. Burdett's experiences with O'Connor and the United Irishmen taught him a certain amount of caution when it came to dealing with Despard and his associates. Although it is possible that he used the campaign to improve prison conditions as a cloak for his involvement in more subversive activities, his continued support for the cause long after Despard's execution suggests that a genuine concern for the plight of political prisoners was the reason he took up Despard's case.

Burdett's role in securing the passage of Catholic Emancipation has been almost completely passed over. Although it is acknowledged that he played a part and in several works the 1825 and 1827 Relief Bills are labelled 'Burdett's Relief Bill' or 'Burdett's motion',⁷⁹ the impression is given that Burdett was merely Daniel O'Connell's parliamentary mouthpiece and his participation in the campaign is reduced to introducing measures for debate in the House. Hinde's *Catholic Emancipation: A Shake To Men's Minds* (Oxford, 1992), for example, contains just five references to Burdett, most of which only relate to him introducing Catholic relief bills into the Commons. There is no discussion of Burdett's views on Emancipation, or indeed on Irish politics generally, and this is the case in many other works which deal with Irish politics and Catholic Emancipation. Biographies of O'Connell in particular have marginalised the contribution of Burdett and other English politicians,⁸⁰ and many works advance the idea that O'Connell coached Burdett and had to pressure him to present the bill in parliament. For example, MacDonagh

⁷⁹ See Ward, B., *The Eve of Catholic Emancipation: Being the History of the English Catholics During the First Thirty Years of the Nineteenth Century* (3 Vols., London, 1911-12), Volume III, p. 163; McDowell, R. B., *Public Opinion and Government Policy in Ireland, 1801-1846* (London, 1952), p. 99; Reynolds, J. A., *The Catholic Emancipation Crisis in Ireland, 1823-1829* (New Haven, 1954), p. 23; Machin, G. I. T., *The Catholic Question in English Politics 1820 to 1830* (Oxford, 1964), p. 65; Norman, E., *A History of Modern Ireland* (London, 1971), p. 40; MacIntyre, A., *The Liberator: Daniel O'Connell and the Irish Party 1830-1847* (London, 1965), p. 8; O'Ferrall, F., *Catholic Emancipation: Daniel O'Connell and the Birth of Irish Democracy 1820-1830* (Dublin, 1985), p. 92; MacDonagh, *Hereditary Bondsman*, p. 245; Connolly, S. J., 'Mass Politics and Sectarian Conflict' in Vaughan, W. E. (ed.), *A New History of Ireland: V Ireland under the Union, 1 1801-70* (Oxford, 1989), p. 95; Hinde, W., *Catholic Emancipation: A Shake to Men's Minds* (Oxford, 1992), p. 30; Connell, P., *Romanticism, Economics and the Question of 'Culture'* (Oxford, 2001), p. 201; Hilton, *A Mad, Bad and Dangerous People?: England 1783-1846* (Oxford, 2006), p. 289.

⁸⁰ See Gwynn, D., *Daniel O'Connell, The Irish Liberator* (London, 1929); MacIntyre, *The Liberator*;

claimed that Burdett was 'press[ed]' by O'Connell to introduce the Relief Bill into the House of Commons in 1825.⁸¹ Crimmins also claimed that O'Connell induced Burdett to introduce the motion concerning Catholic claims to the House of Commons.⁸² Consequently, historians have struggled to define Burdett's role. For example, Bernard Ward sees Burdett as a prominent figure 'in speaking and voting in favour of the Catholics'⁸³ but claims that O'Connell was responsible for the first draft of the 1825 bill.⁸⁴ Gwynn agrees. He describes Burdett as a 'courageous advocate of Catholic rights'⁸⁵ but sees O'Connell as being 'chiefly responsible' for the bill's 'original draft'.⁸⁶ However, Gwynn contradicts himself by also describing the 1825 bill as 'the sequel to a resolution proposed by Sir Francis Burdett',⁸⁷ implying that Burdett played an instrumental role in its formulation. Reynolds describes Burdett as one of the 'patrons'⁸⁸ of Emancipation but sees O'Connell as having 'a major role in drawing up the terms'⁸⁹ of the 1825 Relief Bill. Similarly, Norman writes that Burdett 'drew his Bill up in co-operation with Plunket and O'Connell' but claims that 'the first draft' was 'made by O'Connell alone'.⁹⁰ Norman also remarks that leadership of the Emancipation campaign was in the hands of 'Irishmen, such as the Protestant Emancipationists Henry Grattan and William Plunket, and the Catholic Daniel O'Connell',⁹¹ not English politicians like Burdett. Machin acknowledges Burdett's role, claiming he prepared the 1825 Relief Bill 'with the help of Plunket and O'Connell'⁹² and also giving some detail of Burdett's speech during debates on the 1827 relief motion but he too fails to recognise his importance in the campaign. Bonwick does briefly discuss the Emancipation campaign and acknowledges

MacDonagh, *Hereditary Bondsman*

⁸¹ MacDonagh, *Hereditary Bondsman*, p. 217.

⁸² Crimmins, J. E., 'Jeremy Bentham and Daniel O'Connell: Their Correspondence and Radical Alliance, 1828-1831', *HJ*, 40 (1997) p. 365

⁸³ Ward, *Eve of Catholic Emancipation*, Volume III, p. 176.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

⁸⁵ Gwynn, D., *The Struggle for Catholic Emancipation (1750-1829)* (London, 1928), p. 239.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 225.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Reynolds, *Catholic Emancipation Crisis*, p. 91.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁹⁰ Norman, *History of Modern Ireland*, p. 61.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

⁹² Machin, *The Catholic Question*, p. 55.

Burdett's central role claiming that 'Burdett, together with O'Connell led the agitation for Catholic Emancipation'⁹³ and that 'Catholic Emancipation was an area where Burdett led rather than followed the people'.⁹⁴ Hodlin's work also contains some discussion of Burdett and emancipation, recognising both his dedication and long term commitment to the cause and pointing out that his position as an independent MP meant he could easily negotiate with men of all parties on the issue. Hodlin remarks that Burdett gave the campaign his 'full support'⁹⁵ and that he 'devoted his parliamentary energies'⁹⁶ to Emancipation in the 1820s. However, in these works, discussion of Burdett and Emancipation is relatively brief and Hodlin does not highlight Burdett's central and leading role. Dinwiddy is one of the few historians to acknowledge Burdett's 'leading part'⁹⁷ in the Emancipation campaign, but he does not provide any in depth analysis of Burdett's role.

II

One of the key reasons for the misrepresentation of Burdett in historical works on the nineteenth century is the problem of categorisation. Jay has remarked that 'Burdett has perhaps been so little remembered because his career presents, from a modern political perspective, such a puzzling transit from the left of the spectrum to the right'.⁹⁸ The difficulty in identifying Burdett's political affiliations was one that was highlighted during his own lifetime. In 1804, for example, it was remarked that 'The political character of Sir Francis Burdett, (for on his private character all agree) will be viewed in very different likes by the advocates of the different parties now in this country'.⁹⁹ In 1809 Lord Byron referred to Burdett as 'the general *football* ... kicked

⁹³ Bonwick, 'The Radicalism of Sir Francis Burdett', p. 74.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

⁹⁵ Hodlin, 'The Political Career of Sir Francis Burdett', p. 161.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

⁹⁷ Dinwiddy, 'Sir Francis Burdett and Burdettite Radicalism', p. 31.

⁹⁸ Jay, M., *The Unfortunate Colonel Despard*, p. 351.

⁹⁹ *The Middlesex Election Candidly Considered in its Cause and Consequences with a Prefatory Address. To which are added a Brief View of Sir Francis Burdett's Conduct and Character: and a Short Address to the Freeholders of Middlesex* (London, 1804), p. 12.

at by all, and owned by none'.¹⁰⁰ In 1837 political diarist Charles Greville complained about Burdett's political character, remarking 'nobody can tell what he is, for his answers and explanations are of a shuffling, ambiguous character'.¹⁰¹ Burdett himself also recognised the problem people had with identifying his political allegiances, writing to Hobhouse in December 1818 'Tories call me a Whig & Whigs a Tory!!'.¹⁰² As a result there has been a great deal of confusion amongst historians over the tone and nature of Burdett's political philosophy, and over where he stands in the nineteenth century political spectrum. Was he a Whig, a Tory or a Radical? Burdett has been hailed as all of these things by historians of the nineteenth century. For example he has been called one of 'the most progressive of the Whigs',¹⁰³ 'no Whig',¹⁰⁴ and a 'professed enemy' of the Whigs.¹⁰⁵ He has been declared a Tory hero who 'in a period of Tory obscurantism and stagnation nobly and eloquently expressed' an 'authentic Tory view of society',¹⁰⁶ and has been described as a 'Tory-Radical',¹⁰⁷ with an 'almost 'Tory' reverence for the Crown'.¹⁰⁸ It has also been noted that Burdett 'settled comfortably into old age as a High Tory',¹⁰⁹ and that he was the 'scion of a Jacobite family ... with the self-proclaimed views of an Anneian Tory'.¹¹⁰ He has been labelled 'in part a Tory, in part a Radical, but never a Whig'.¹¹¹ Burdett is regularly identified as a Radical politician and independent MP.¹¹² For example, Cameron, despite linking Burdett with 'the Independent

¹⁰⁰ Marchand, *Byron's Letters and Journals*, Volume I, p. 186.

¹⁰¹ Reeve, H. (ed), *The Greville Memoirs, A Journal of the Reigns of King George IV, King William IV and Queen Victoria* (8 Vols., London, 1888), Volume III, p. 406.

¹⁰² BL, Broughton Papers, Add MSS 47222, folio 7. Burdett to J. C. Hobhouse, 30 December 1818.

¹⁰³ Olphin, H. K., *George Tierney* (London, 1934), p. 112.

¹⁰⁴ Wasson, E. A., *Whig Renaissance: Lord Althorp and the Whig Party 1782-1845* (London, 1987), p. 59.

¹⁰⁵ Thomas, W., *Philosophic Radicals*, p. 41. Butler also describes Burdett as being hostile to the orthodox Whigs (Butler, *Great Reform Bill*, p. 25).

¹⁰⁶ Biggs-Dawson, J., *Tory Lives: From Falkland to Disraeli* (London, 1952), p. 100.

¹⁰⁷ Hilton, *A Mad, Bad and Dangerous People?*, p. 519.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

¹⁰⁹ Jay, *The Unfortunate Colonel Despard*, p. 351.

¹¹⁰ Sack, J. J., *From Jacobite to Conservative: Reaction and Orthodoxy in Britain, c. 1760-1832* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 158.

¹¹¹ Cahill, 'Burdett', p. 69.

¹¹² See for example Butler, *Great Reform Bill*, p. 155; Gwynn, *The Struggle for Catholic Emancipation*, p. 239; Foord, A. S., *His Majesty's Opposition 1714-1830* (Oxford, 1964), p. 440; Cannon, *Parliamentary Reform*, p. 131n; Brock, *Great Reform Act*, p. 160; Thomas, D., *Cochrane: Britannia's Sea Wolf* (London, 1978), p. 110; Hill, *British Parliamentary Parties*, pp. 189 and 202;

whigs',¹¹³ also claimed that he was 'a lone wolf politician defying the wrath of both Whigs and Tories'.¹¹⁴ Harris claimed that Burdett was chief of 'the avowed Radicals, who repudiated Whig leadership'.¹¹⁵ E. P. Thompson described Burdett as an 'extreme radical',¹¹⁶ while Butler asserted that Burdett was one of the 'more constitutional of the Radicals'.¹¹⁷ Erdman described Burdett as a 'Radical Spokesman'¹¹⁸ and a 'Radical leader',¹¹⁹ while Kriegel saw him as 'an aristocratic radical'.¹²⁰ In truth Burdett was all of these things, and his political philosophy contained elements of each political strand. His love of liberty was borrowed from the Whig tradition, but many of his ideas and beliefs were, as Dinwiddy points out, 'reminiscent of Bolingbrokean Toryism'.¹²¹ Burdett was also a Radical, in the sense that he was an independent MP who adopted a 'radical', meaning anti-government and pro-reform, agenda. As has been recognised by Jay

Burdett's politics were forged in an age that knew no such categories. In his own view, the traditional values of liberty and justice were his fixed star; all that changed were the commitment to liberty and justice in the world around him, and his personal appetite for fighting on the front line.¹²²

Many works on the nineteenth century identify Burdett as a Whig of some description.¹²³ Gash and Gillen both described Burdett as 'Radical Whig',¹²⁴ while

Nattrass, L., *William Cobbett: The Politics of Style* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 22 and 78; Cook, C., *The Longman Companion to Britain in the Nineteenth Century, 1815-1914* (London, 1999), p. 261; Roberts, A., *Napoleon and Wellington* (London, 2002), p. 99; Jay, *The Unfortunate Colonel Despard*, p. 285; McCord and Perdue, *British History*, p. 20.

¹¹³ Cameron, 'Shelley and the Reformers', p. 63.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

¹¹⁵ Harris, W., *The History of the Radical Party in Parliament* (London, 1885), p. 149.

¹¹⁶ Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, p. 508.

¹¹⁷ Butler, *Great Reform Bill*, p. 301.

¹¹⁸ Erdman, D. V., 'Lord Byron as Rinaldo', *PMLA* 57 (March 1942), p. 189 and 202.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 207.

¹²⁰ Kriegel, A. D., 'Liberty and Whiggery in Early Nineteenth Century England', *Journal of Modern History* 52 (June 1980), p. 268.

¹²¹ Dinwiddy, J. R., 'Bentham's Transition to Political Radicalism, 1809-10', *JHI* 36, (October-December 1975), p. 691. See Chapter 1, Section I for the links between Burdett's political philosophy and Bolingbrokean thought.

¹²² Jay, *The Unfortunate Colonel Despard*, p. 351.

¹²³ See for example Machin, *The Catholic Question*, p. 40; Gash, N., *Mr Secretary Peel: The Life of*

Osborne called him a 'liberal Whig',¹²⁵ and remarked 'Burdett was a Whig with some advanced political views which deceived many of his contemporaries as well as some modern historians into believing that he was a radical'.¹²⁶ Willis identified Burdett as a member of the Foxite Whig opposition between 1796 and 1801, as did Graham.¹²⁷ Medd has claimed that Burdett was on the 'extreme flank' of the Whig party between 1808 and 1812,¹²⁸ while Clark identified Burdett as a member of the 'Whig leadership' in 1827.¹²⁹ Burdett was closely allied to the Whig party for much of his political career, particularly with the more radical elements of the party, men such as Wardle, Madocks and Whitbread. This would explain the assumption amongst many historians of the nineteenth century that he was a Whig. However, Burdett never actually joined the ranks of the party. Burdett's support for the Whigs up until the early 1830s was a result of his belief that they were, like him, defenders of liberty and friends of reform. His pragmatism and practicality played an important part in his political allegiance. For Burdett supporting the party who represented the best chance of achieving his goals was not inconsistent with his role as an independent member. At the Middlesex election in August 1804 Burdett identified himself with 'the Whig interest of this country' claiming that 'the Whig principles are those which must save the country',¹³⁰ but noted that

if I should find that the Whig interest deserted its principles, or if the Tory Interest abandoned their errors you would find me as ardent in the ranks of their forces as I have hitherto been in those of the Whigs.¹³¹

Burdett was repelled by the severity of the policy that Pitt's government took towards

Sir Robert Peel to 1830 (London, 1961), p. 313; Knight, F., *University Rebel: The Life of William Frend, 1757-1841* (London, 1971), p. 244.

¹²⁴ See Gash, *Mr Secretary Peel*, p. 301; and Gillen, M., *The Assassination of the Prime Minister: The Shocking Death of Spencer Perceval* (London, 1972), p. 15.

¹²⁵ Osborne, J. W., 'William Cobbett and Ireland', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 70, 278/279 (Summer/Autumn 1981), p. 190.

¹²⁶ Osborne, *Cartwright*, p. 74.

¹²⁷ Willis, R. E., "'A Handful of Violent People": The Nature of the Foxite Opposition, 1794-1801', *Albion* 8 (Autumn 1976), p. 253-4; and Graham, J., *The Nation, The Law and The King. Reform Politics in England, 1789-1799* (2 Vols., Maryland, 2000), Volume II, p. 863.

¹²⁸ Medd, P., *Romilly: A Life of Samuel Romilly, Lawyer and Reformer* (London, 1968), p. 255.

¹²⁹ Clark, *English Society*, p. 525.

¹³⁰ *Middlesex Election 1804*, p. 30.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

unrest and dissent during the war with Revolutionary France. In such circumstances, reform became indistinguishable from treason and, fearing revolution, the Pittites strongly resisted it. The Whigs however, were far more open to the prospect of reform, and it is undoubtedly this that ensured Burdett had a closer relationship with them until the early 1830s. In the Commons in 1809 Burdett declared that 'He would not join any faction: but he would be glad to support any minister who acted properly'.¹³² Eighteen years later Burdett would do exactly that when he agreed to support Canning's ministry against the Ultra Tories, seeing it as the best chance of achieving Catholic Emancipation; he did the same in the early 1830s when he backed the pro-reform Whig ministry of Lord Grey.

But after 1833 Burdett found little he could support about Whig policy and was particularly dismayed at their inability to pacify Ireland. The Whig failure to deliver their libertarian promise in the 1830s and the regeneration of the Tories into the Conservative Party under Sir Robert Peel ensured that Burdett's underlying 'Tory proclivities'¹³³ began to assert themselves and in 1837 he accepted the invitation to stand as Conservative member for North Wiltshire. Burdett was at heart an eighteenth century country gentleman and country gentlemen were traditionally Tory in outlook. In 1819 Burdett identified his political creed as that of a Tory in the reign of Queen Anne.¹³⁴ At his libel trial in 1820 Burdett acknowledged that although he often 'acted with' and 'voted with' the Whigs, 'I am a Tory',¹³⁵ particularly in his views on the constitutional role of the monarchy. In 1833 John Wilson Croker, at the time a close friend of Burdett's, noted that Burdett was '*born* a Tory'.¹³⁶ Holland remarked that Burdett had a 'deep but often shaded tinge of Toryism'¹³⁷ throughout his political career and in 1833 remarked that 'His political creed is a strange medly of monarchical and republican notions, of Tory and democratical prejudices and

¹³² *CPD*, Volume XIV, London, 1809, p. 730.

¹³³ Dinwiddy, 'Bentham's Transition to Political Radicalism', p. 691.

¹³⁴ See *PD*, Volume XL, p. 1455.

¹³⁵ *State Trials*, Volume I, p. 44.

¹³⁶ Jennings, L. J. (ed), *The Croker Papers: The Correspondence and Diaries of the Late Right Honourable John Wilson Croker, LL.D., F.R.S., Secretary to the Admiralty from 1809 to 1830* (London, 1884), Volume II, p. 211.

maxims'.¹³⁸ In 1837 Holland described Burdett as 'a relapsed and childish Tory'.¹³⁹ By the mid-1830s Burdett saw the emerging Conservative Party in a similar way to that in which he had previously regarded the Whigs, as the best means of protecting property and preserving national institutions. His strong identification with Bolingbrokean thought could well explain this drift into Conservatism in the mid 1830s. Disraeli, for example, celebrated Bolingbroke as the founder of modern Toryism. However, this shift of allegiances, seemingly from one extreme to the other, has created the powerful and lasting impression that Burdett was inconsistent; that he abandoned radicalism and reform and became a reactionary or 'ex-Radical'.¹⁴⁰

Another reason that Burdett has been sidelined by historians is because in a brief overview of his career Burdett seemingly achieved nothing. 'Reputations are often refracted images of past power',¹⁴¹ and Burdett had no official power. He never held nor aspired to political office, was not elevated to the peerage and has no parliamentary acts attached to his name. The lack of any nineteenth century *Life* of Burdett, or any published collection of his papers, adds to this impression of insignificance. In 1883, for example, it was remarked that Burdett was 'interesting to the present generation chiefly as the father of the Baroness Burdett-Coutts'.¹⁴² As a result, Burdett would be of little interest to historians studying the structures of power and the individuals who held power. However, as has been established throughout this work, Burdett was one of the most high-profile politicians of his day. He was involved in a number of prominent political campaigns and played a leading part in many of them, especially Catholic Emancipation and parliamentary reform. His opinion and advice was sought by people from many different political groups, in government, in opposition and outside of parliament, as attested by the large volumes

¹³⁷ Holland, *Further Memoirs*, p. 254.

¹³⁸ Kriegel, A. D. (Ed), *The Holland House Diaries, 1831-1840* (London, 1977), p. 210.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 357.

¹⁴⁰ Lewis, C. J., 'The Disintegration of the Tory-Anglican Alliance in the Struggle for Catholic Emancipation', *Church History* 29 (March 1960), p. 26.

¹⁴¹ Corfield, P. J., Green, E. M., and Harvey, C., 'Westminster Man: Charles James Fox and his Electorate, 1780-1806', *Parliamentary History* 20, (2001), p. 157.

¹⁴² 'The O'Connell Papers. Part XI. Letters from Cardinal Wiseman and Others', *The Irish Monthly* 11 (June 1883), p. 342.

of correspondence between Burdett and various other prominent political figures of the day.¹⁴³ Burdett's name appears frequently in the press throughout his career. Cahill has remarked that 'During the years 1835-7, Sir Francis received as much newspaper coverage in *The Times*, *Morning Post*, *Morning Herald* and *Standard* as any important member of the Whig cabinet'.¹⁴⁴ The reason that Burdett did not have any 'power' was his own choice. He rejected any inclusion in government, valuing his independence, and turned down the offer of a peerage twice, believing his place to be in the House of Commons where he could have the most influence.¹⁴⁵ Moreover, the reason that Burdett has had no specific act attached to his name is because the campaigns that he involved himself in were large-scale, long-term political movements that were also adopted by many other politicians. Burdett worked closely with other supporters of these campaigns, both within and outside of parliament, introducing measures when necessary, but also being willing to step back and let others take the lead when the circumstances required it. The Catholic Emancipation campaign is a perfect example of this. Burdett was by no means the first to adopt Emancipation as a political issue, nor was he its only supporter. He worked closely with other advocates, such as Plunket and O'Connell, and introduced motions into the House which are recognised as 'Burdett's bill' or 'Burdett's motion'. However, the final bill is not attributed to Burdett, despite the fact that its terms were virtually identical to 'Burdett's bill' of 1825, because he did not introduce it into the Commons. Furthermore, the lack of any *Life* of Burdett or published collection of his papers in the nineteenth century is not because he was regarded as politically insignificant, it was because his family, particularly his daughter Angela, jealously guarded his papers, not wishing for personal details about the family's troubles to be made public knowledge. It was not until the 1940s that Burdett's papers actually entered the public domain.

Burdett has also been the victim of historiographical fashion. The works most critical

¹⁴³ Burdett corresponded with, amongst others, Arthur O'Connor, Lord Grey, Sir Robert Peel, John Cam Hobhouse, Francis Place and Jeremy Bentham.

¹⁴⁴ Cahill, 'Burdett', p. 72.

of Burdett were written in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, the hey-day of the fashion for working class history and 'history from below'. During this period, upper class reformers like Burdett were sidelined in favour of men who, because of their 'humbler' origins, can be more easily portrayed as heroes of the working man, men like Cartwright, Cobbett, Hunt and O'Connell. This period also saw a shift away from the study of London metropolitan radicalism, particularly Burdett's stronghold's at Westminster, which was dominated by 'gentlemen radicals', to northern working class radical movements. Left-wing historians, who popularised this type of history, will never accept the relevance and importance of an upper-class gentleman in the struggle for rights and equality. In biographies of the men celebrated as heroes of the working class Burdett is generally given a poor reception. For example, Osborne, who pours scorn upon Burdett's credentials as a radical, writing 'Anyone who took Burdett to be a radical at the time deceived himself',¹⁴⁶ has written extensively about Cartwright and Cobbett.¹⁴⁷ Belchem, who fiercely criticised Burdett, is a biographer of Hunt. In his biography of Cobbett, Spater claimed that Burdett 'spoke well' but 'was lazy' and had Cobbett write speeches for him.¹⁴⁸ He also remarked that Cobbett's view that Burdett was a 'sham-reformer' was 'amply justified'.¹⁴⁹ However, more recent historiography has begun to readdress the role of gentlemen radicals in the nineteenth century reform campaign. For example, Hodlin has remarked that Burdett's career demonstrates 'the necessity of the aristocratic politician to grassroots radicalism'.¹⁵⁰ Belchem and Epstein's 'The Nineteenth-Century Gentleman Leader Revisited' (*Social History* 22) has also recognised 'the central role played by the gentleman leader',¹⁵¹ arguing that such men acted as 'an important bridging figure[s]',¹⁵² in the sense that they made appeals

¹⁴⁵ See Chapter 1, Section I.

¹⁴⁶ Osborne, *Cartwright*, p. 94.

¹⁴⁷ See *ibid.*; Osborne 'William Cobbett and Ireland'; and Schweizer, K. W., and Osborne, J. W., *Cobbett in his Times* (London, 1990).

¹⁴⁸ Spater, G., *William Cobbett: The Poor Man's Friend* (2 Vols., Cambridge, 1982), Volume I, p. 193.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, Volume II, p. 486.

¹⁵⁰ Hodlin, 'The Political Career of Sir Francis Burdett', p. 208.

¹⁵¹ Belchem, J. C., and Epstein, J., 'The Nineteenth-Century Gentleman Leader Revisited', *Social History* 22 (May 1997), p. 174.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 174.

beyond class, and transcended both party and parliament, speaking directly to the people. However, although this article identifies Burdett as a 'gentleman leader',¹⁵³ he is not the subject of any discussion in the text of the essay. Burdett continues to be the subject of a great deal of comment, but without any detailed analysis of his ideas, or any real understanding of his politics. Moreover, the left-wing version of the nineteenth century struggle for reform remains a dominant interpretation, and thus Burdett continues to be marginalised.

III

It is clear Burdett's importance and significance has been largely ignored in historical works on the nineteenth century, particularly those written in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. His commitment to the causes that he held dear, such as parliamentary reform and Catholic Emancipation, has been the subject of much scrutiny and as a result his contribution and dedication to these causes has been overlooked. Burdett's reputation as a politician has been tarnished by the events of his later career, especially his 'conversion' to Toryism, and his very public disagreements with men like O'Connell and Cobbett. However, the difficulty in defining Burdett's political ideology has resulted in a confused picture, and has given the impression that he was inconsistent and uncommitted. The fact that he did not hold political office during his career, was not elevated to the peerage, and has no specific parliamentary act attached to his name, has added to the impression that he had a minor role to play in nineteenth century politics. He has also been marginalised because of his class. In truth, Burdett was an important and influential politician during his lifetime. He was at the centre of a number of high profile political campaigns and his opinion and advice was sought by those in parliament and the leaders of extra-parliamentary groups. He had an important and significant role to play in nineteenth century politics, a role which deserves acknowledgement and recognition in works of the period.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

Conclusion

Sir Francis Burdett was an important and significant political figure in the early nineteenth century. His reputations have been contested because he does not easily fit into the political categories often applied to early nineteenth century politicians and he does have links with several political traditions - Whig, Tory and Radical. Burdett was a 'radical' in tactics and style but not in ideas. His political philosophy was inherited from the Tory opposition of the eighteenth century, particularly the ideas of Bolingbroke. He was not a revolutionary or even an extreme radical as his ideas were firmly grounded in established constitutional thought. Burdett supported 'radical' measures, such as universal suffrage and annual parliaments, but he regarded them as forming part of the ancient constitution, which had been subverted by successive governments. His brief flirtation with extreme radicalism in his early years was a formative experience which demonstrated to him that the change he wanted could only be achieved through constitutional channels, not through revolution. Thus, Burdett wanted restoration, not innovation. For him, reform was part of a programme for restoring the constitution. His reputation as a 'radical' is based in large part on his early involvement with Irish revolutionaries, his association with extra-parliamentary radicals, such as Horne Tooke, Cartwright, Hunt and Cobbett, and his radical tone, which aroused the wrath of the government. His reputation as a Whig comes from his close association with that party for much of his career, and his Whig-like dedication to liberty. However, Burdett was ultimately a conservative, which offers explanation as to why he ended his career as a member of Peel's Conservative Party.

The lack of clarity about Burdett's political philosophy has resulted in the impression that he was inconsistent and uncommitted, when in reality Burdett was consistent throughout his career, remaining dedicated to the restoration and protection of the constitution of England and the rights and liberties enshrined within it. This consistency of thought is demonstrated by his life-long commitment to the pacification of Ireland, which he believed would be achieved through the restoration of constitutional rights. Burdett was always a leading figure in every cause that he advocated, especially Catholic Emancipation and parliamentary reform, playing a significant role in acting as an intermediary between parliamentary and extra-parliamentary groups. In today's society, with growing concerns about the

growth of government influence and worries over their subversion of basic rights and liberties, Burdett's ideology still has surprising relevance and his speeches in defence of the English constitution have an enduring resonance.

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