

THE

NATIONAL

ARCHIVES

*Say after Me*

*I shall Reform  
Thou shalt Reform  
He shall Reform  
We shall Reform  
You shall Reform  
They shall Reform*

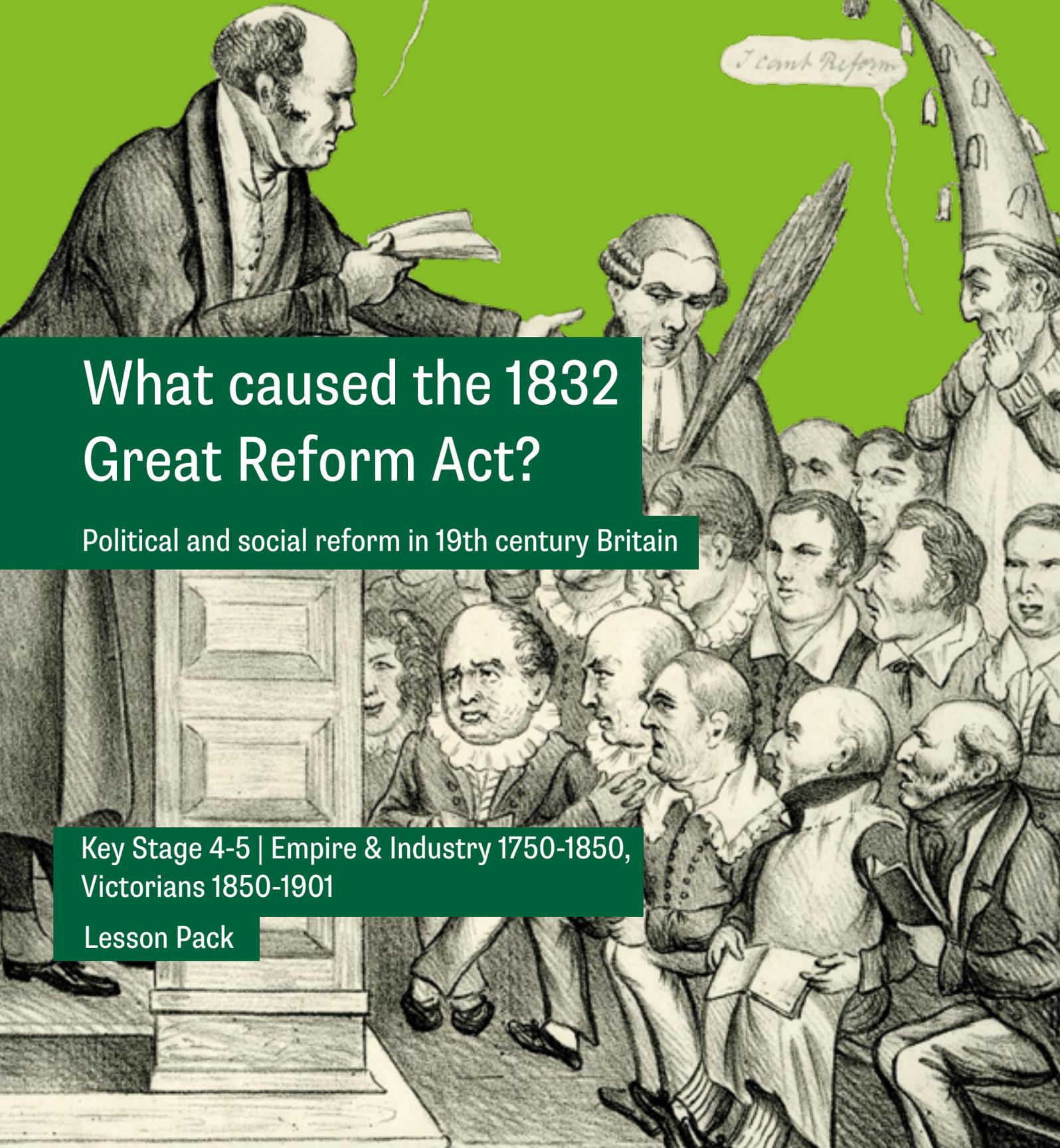
*I can't Reform*

# What caused the 1832 Great Reform Act?

Political and social reform in 19th century Britain

Key Stage 4-5 | Empire & Industry 1750-1850,  
Victorians 1850-1901

Lesson Pack



# Introduction

In 1832, Parliament passed a law that changed the British electoral system. It was known as the Great Reform Act which basically gave the vote to middle class men leaving working men disappointed.

The Reform Act became law in response to years of criticism of the electoral system from those outside and inside Parliament. Elections in Britain were neither fair nor representative. In order to vote, a person had to own property or pay certain taxes to qualify which excluded most working class people. There were also constituencies with several voters that elected two MPs to Parliament such as Old Sarum in Salisbury. In these 'rotten boroughs', with few voters and no secret ballot, it was easy for those standing for election to buy votes. Industrial towns like Manchester or Birmingham, which had grown during the previous 80 years had no Members of Parliament to represent them. In 1831, the House of Commons passed a Reform Bill, but the House of Lords, dominated by the Tory party, defeated it. This was followed by riots and serious disturbances in London, Birmingham, Derby, Nottingham, Leicester, Yeovil, Sherborne, Exeter and Bristol.

In this lesson use original documents from 1830-31 to explore demands for change in the voting system.

## Suitable for:

KS 4 - 5

## Time period:

Victorians 1850-1901  
Empire and Industry  
1750-1850

## Connections to the Curriculum:

### Key stage 4

AQA GCSE History:  
Britain: Power and the people: c1170 to the present day:

### Key stage 5

AQA GCE History: The Age of Reform: Britain 1832-1885

Edexcel GCE History:  
Protest, agitation and parliamentary reform in Britain, c1780-1928

OCR GCE History: From Pitt to Peel: Britain 1783-1853

This resource was produced using documents from the collections of The National Archives and other copyright holders.

Images from copyright holders other than the National Archives may not be reproduced for any purposes without the permission of the copyright holder. Every reasonable effort has been made to trace copyright but the National Archives welcomes any information that clarifies the copyright ownership of any unattributed material displayed.

# Contents

Introduction	<a href="#">Page 2</a>	Source Two	<a href="#">Page 13</a>
Content and Sources	<a href="#">Page 3</a>	Source Three A & B	<a href="#">Page 14</a>
Teachers Notes	<a href="#">Page 4</a>	Source Three C	<a href="#">Page 16</a>
Background	<a href="#">Page 6</a>	Source Three D	<a href="#">Page 18</a>
Starter Activity	<a href="#">Page 7</a>	Source Three E	<a href="#">Page 20</a>
Tasks	<a href="#">Page 8</a>	Source Three F	<a href="#">Page 22</a>
Source One	<a href="#">Page 10</a>	Source Three G	<a href="#">Page 24</a>

## Sources

Illustration image: Lithograph entitled 'The School of Reform' printed by W. & J. O. Clerk, Published by S. Gans, May 1831 © The Trustees of the British Museum.

Earl Charles Grey, Liberal/Whig Prime Minister is shown holding a blank book, he is standing behind a high stool. Nine of the thirteen members of Grey's cabinet were members of the House of Lords when he was made Prime Minister in November 1830, determined to produce a reform bill that aimed to give more people a voice and representation in Parliament. Shown from (right to left) boys to represent the Dukes of Cumberland and Gloucester, Lord Eldon and Ellenborough (partly hidden by Grey's desk), with Lord Londonderry on his left. In the second row are seven boys including Lord Wetherell, sitting next Sir Robert Peel and thumbing his nose. On the right are Aberdeen and Newcastle. The boys do not look at their books. The Duke of Wellington (he is a strong Tory) weeps with the fingers of both hands in his mouth and his cap resembles a fool's cap. The boys are drawn in caricature with small bodies and large heads.

- Source 1: A petition from South Shields in County Durham, 31 August 1830, Catalogue ref: HO 44/24.
- Source 2: Advertisement for a dinner in Gateshead in August 1830 to celebrate the July 1830 revolution in France, Catalogue ref: HO 44/21.
- Sources 3a-g: Extracts from 'The Bristol Gazette' on a riot in Bristol, 3 November 1831, Catalogue ref: HO 40/28.

## Teacher's Notes

This lesson uses sources from The National Archives to explore some of the context to the passage of the Great Reform Act of 1832. Before starting, it would be useful to ensure that students are familiar with key political terms: suffrage; ballot; representation; franchise; legislature for example.

The first source to be examined is a petition from South Shields in County Durham, 31 August 1830. The townspeople chose to petition Parliament to demand the right to elect their own MPs. They also give their reasons why they want to be part of the political process. The source demonstrates the demand for political reform in the country especially in growing industrial towns. It is also worth discussing with students the tone of the petition, which is highly respectful. This source is quite challenging in comparison to the others, teachers may wish to break it down into sections for discussion. Words are defined in square brackets and phrases explained at the end of the transcript to support.

The second source is an advertisement for a dinner in Gateshead in August 1830 to celebrate the July 1830 revolution in France. This was part of wave of revolutions which swept across Europe. The July revolution in France was the second in France, since 1789. It marked the overthrow of Bourbon King Charles X who was replaced by Louise Philippe, Duke of Orleans as King. Louise Philippe was later forced to abdicate in the Revolution of 1848. It is important to explore with students why the government might have been concerned and gathered information about this meeting. How does it help to explain the growing demand for political reform in the 19th century?

Finally, students look at a series extracts from an article in the 'The

## Teacher's Notes

Bristol Gazette' on a riot in Bristol, 3 November 1831. According to the newspaper, there were 8 inquests into why people died during the riot 'of which two died by excessive drinking, four were burnt in the Square, and two were shot. A very great number must have lost their lives, of which we can obtain no account'. Here students can look at the response of the authorities to events and determine if these events were linked to the demand for political reform and changes to voting system. Why was Sir

Charles Wetherell so disliked? What other factors caused discontent? The source could also provide the opportunity to discuss the role of the press and how these events are reported.

## Background

The riots in Bristol were some of the worst seen in England in the 19th century. They began when Sir Charles Wetherall, who was opposed to the Reform Bill, came to open the Assize Court in his role as Recorder, or senior judge. Assize courts were held in the main county towns and presided over by visiting judges from the higher courts based in London. Public buildings and houses were set on fire, there was more than £300,000 of damage and twelve people died. Of 102 people arrested and tried, 31 were sentenced to death. Lieutenant-Colonel Brereton, the commander of the army in Bristol, was court-martialled.

There was a fear in government that unless there was some reform there might be a revolution instead. They looked to the July 1830 revolution in France, which overthrew King Charles X and replaced him with the more moderate King Louis-Philippe who agreed to a constitutional monarchy.

In Britain, King William IV lost popularity for standing in the way of reform. Eventually he agreed to create new Whig peers, and when the House of Lords heard this, they agreed to pass the Reform Act. As result, 57 'rotten and pocket boroughs' were removed and the new towns like Birmingham, Bradford, Leeds, and Sheffield for example given the right to elect MPs, although constituencies were still of uneven size. However, only men in the boroughs who owned property worth at least £10 could vote. In the counties only adult men owning property worth £2 a year and adult males renting land worth more than £50 a year. Most working class men were excluded from the vote owing to these property qualifications – which varied across the country depending upon house prices and only men who could afford to pay to stand for election could be MPs. All women were excluded. In effect most middle class men gained the vote and some skilled craftsmen. This reform did not go far enough to silence all protest.

## Starter Activity

Teachers could use the illustration image, a lithograph entitled: 'Conjugation of the verb to Reform: 'The School of Reform', printed in May 1831 for a starter activity. Define the term: 'Conjugation' as the change that takes place in a verb to express person e.g. you, I, we, they.

- Ask the students to describe what is shown in the picture
- Use the source and caption notes at the end lesson to identify the characters
- What does the title of the image suggest?
- What impression does the image infer about the government's attitude towards reform?
- Why do you think this cartoon image was produced?
- What does it infer about agitation for reform of the electoral system?
- Where or how would people have seen this image?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of using visual evidence?

You may want to split the lesson for students working individually or use the document sources in paired/group work. Students should be encouraged to think about the limitations of looking at this evidence to evaluate any understanding of the demand for reform to electoral system.

All sources are transcribed and difficult language defined in square brackets. Source one also has some asterisked notes.

Please note that content in this lesson has been redeveloped from content in our Power Politics & Protest focussed topic website which has been archived as the interactive parts no longer work.

# Tasks

## Task 1

A petition from South Shields in County Durham, 31 August 1830, Catalogue ref: HO 44/24

The people of South Shields and the surrounding neighbourhood held a meeting in their town hall on 31 December 1830. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss petitioning Parliament about reform. The town wanted to be able to elect their own MPs. The meeting was called by the magistrates and chaired by a local Justice of the Peace. They debated the wording of a petition and made it available in the town hall and in shops so that all classes of people could sign it. This is the petition that was adopted.

- What is a petition?
- What reasons are given by the people of South Shields to persuade Parliament to pass the reform bill?
- What type of people supported the petition?
- How do the petitioners try and show their goodwill to Parliament while making this request for reform?
- Does this source infer why the government later passed the Great Reform Act in 1832?
- What other sources might provide evidence for why people demanded political reform?

## Task 2

Advertisement for a dinner in Gateshead in August 1830 to celebrate the July 1830 revolution in France, Catalogue ref: HO 44/21

- Define the terms: 'liberty'; 'tyranny' and 'commemoration'.
- What type of people might have attended this dinner?
- Why would they want to celebrate this particular event?
- The code for this document is 'HO' which stands for the Home Office. Can you find out why this document is held in a Home Office file? [Clue: think about the role of the Home Office in Government]
- How does this source help explain the growing demand for political reform in the 19th century?

# Tasks

## Task 3

Extracts from 'The Bristol Gazette' on a riot in Bristol, 3 November 1831

Catalogue ref: HO 40/28.

According to this newspaper, there were 8 inquests into why people died during the riot 'of which two died by excessive drinking, four were burnt in the Square, and two were shot. A very great number must have lost their lives, of which we can obtain no account'.

Read these extracts from 'The Bristol Gazette' newspaper.

- What happened during the riot at Bristol according to the headlines? (Extracts a, b)
- Who are the rioters and how are they described? (Extract a, b, c, e, f)
- What was the role of the 'Special Constables' during the disturbances? How were they viewed? (Extracts c, d)
- What is the attitude of this source towards Sir Charles Wetherell? (Extracts a, b, c)
- Do the extracts suggest that the riot could have been prevented in any way?
- Why do you think that the prisons, custom house and toll houses and toll gates were attacked or burnt?
- How do the authorities hope to prevent future disturbances? (Extract g)
- Does this source infer why the government passed the Great Reform Act in 1832?

## A petition from South Shields in County Durham, 31 August 1830

Catalogue Ref: HO 44/24

The Humble Petition of the undersigned Merchants, Manufacturers, Shipowners, and other Inhabitants of the Town of South Shields, and its Neighbourhood,  
**Sheweth,**

That the present State of the Representation, excluding from direct Influence, in the Election of Members of Parliament, very many of His Majesty's Subjects, who sustain a great charge of direct Taxation, has thereby departed from the Principle of the Constitution, and has become in an especial degree, inadequate to the wants of the Country, in respect of the trading Community, inhabiting large Towns.

That the "*Town of South Shields*," extending through the contiguous Townships of South Shields and Westoe, contained in 1821, a Population of 16,500 Persons, exclusive of Seamen. That that Number, as your Petitioners believe, has of late years, greatly increased, and is chiefly engaged either in Manufactures, for which the Situation of the Town, and the Resources of its Neighbourhood, afford great Facilities, or in extensive Concerns of Shipping, there being 13 Graving Docks, and 58,000 Tons of Shipping, owned by the Inhabitants of South Shields.

That your Petitioners humbly state their Persuasion, that the Trade and Shipping Interests of the Town, might have been more effectually promoted, if your Petitioners, had been able to convey to the Legislature, the Facts and Arguments, collected by their own Experience, through the constitutional Organ, of Representatives of their own Choice, and that, under every Event, the Decision of the Legislature, would be acted upon, with readier Alacrity, if your Petitioners could feel satisfied, that such Decision had proceeded upon that full Consideration of their Interests, which it would be the Office and Duty of their local Representatives to procure.

That the County of Durham, wherein your Petitioners reside, returns from within the entire Body of the County, fewer Members, in the Ratio of its Population, than any other English County, namely 4 only, 2 for the County, and 2 for the City of Durham. That there is no Community between your Petitioners and the Electors of the City of Durham, in respect of Trade or local Interests, and that the Property in this Town and Neighbourhood, being, with an inconsiderable Exception, Leasehold under the Dean and Chapter of Durham, your Petitioners do not enjoy any influential Voice in the Return of the Members for the County; and it is the Belief of your Petitioners, that owing to these Circumstances, they labour under a more serious Destitution of the elective Franchise, than the Inhabitants of any other Town in Great Britain, of equal Trade and Magnitude.

That it is not the Intent of your Petitioners, to obtrude on your Honourable House, any Recommendation, as to particular Schemes, by which the Defects of the Representation may best be remedied; that they confide in the Wisdom and Justice of your Honourable House, so to regulate the elective Franchise, as to impart it more extensively to those of their Fellow Subjects, who possess enough of Intelligence, to form a judicious Choice, and enough of Property (the Fruit of Industry and Skill) to maintain that Choice with Independence. And your Petitioners most earnestly entreat your Honourable House, to take such early Measures of Parliamentary Reform, as may redress these Grievances of your Petitioners, which they have humbly set forth, and promote the Concord, and Stability of the Empire.

**And your Petitioners shall ever pray &c.**

## Transcript: A petition from South Shields in County Durham

Catalogue Ref: HO 44/24

Note: Some words are explained in brackets, and some asterisked\* phrases are explained at the end of transcript.

To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, in Parliament assembled.

The Humble Petition of the undersigned Merchants, Manufacturers, Ship owners and other Inhabitants of the Town of South Shields, and its neighbourhood,

Sheweth, [shows]

That the "Town of South Shields", extending through the contiguous [neighbouring] Townships of South Shields and Westoe, contained in 1821, a Population of 16,500 Persons, exclusive of Seamen. That the Number, as your Petitioners believe, has of late years, greatly increased, and is chiefly engaged either in Manufactures, for which the Situation of the Town, and the Resources of its Neighbourhood, afford built [have] great Facilities, or in extensive Concerns of Shipping, there being 13 Graving Docks [these are dry docks where ships could be built and repaired], and 58,000 Tons of Shipping, owned by the Inhabitants of South Shields.

That your Petitioners humbly state their Persuasion, that the Trade and Shipping Interests of the Town, might have been more effectually [better] promoted, if your Petitioners, had been able to convey to the Legislature, the Facts and Arguments, collected by their own Experience, through the constitutional [Parliament], Organ of Representatives of their own Choice [M.P.s elected by them], and that, under every Event, the Decision of the Legislature [Parliament] , would be acted upon, with readier Alacrity [speed], if your Petitioners could feel satisfied, that such Decision had proceeded upon that full Consideration of their Interests, which it would be the Office and Duty of their local Representatives to procure [get].

That the County of Durham, wherein your Petitioners reside, returns from within the entire Body of the County, fewer Members [M.Ps], in the Ratio of its Population, than any other

## Transcript: A petition from South Shields in County Durham

Catalogue Ref: HO 44/24

English County, namely 4 only, 2 for the County, and 2 for the City of Durham. That there is no Community between your Petitioners and the Electors of the City of Durham, in respect of Trade or local Interests, and that the Property\* in this Town and Neighbourhood, being, with an inconsiderable Exception, Leasehold under the Dean and Chapter of Durham, your Petitioners do not enjoy any influential Voice in the Return of the Members for the County; and it is the Belief of your Petitioners, that owing to these Circumstances, they labour [they suffer a greater lack of the right to vote.] under a more serious Destitution of the elective Franchise, than the Inhabitants of any other Town in Great Britain, of equal Trade and Magnitude [size]. That it is not the Intent\*\* of your Petitioners, to obtrude on your Honourable House, any Recommendation, as to particular Schemes, by which the Defects of the Representation may best be remedied; that they confide\*\*\* in the Wisdom and Justice of your Honourable House, so to regulate the elective Franchise, as to impart it more extensively to those of their Fellow Subjects, who possess enough of Intelligence, to form a judicious Choice, and enough of Property (the Fruit of Industry and Skill) to maintain that Choice with Independence. And your Petitioners most earnestly entreat [request] your Honourable House, to take such early Measures of Parliamentary Reform, as may redress [set right] these Grievances of your Petitioners, which they have humbly set forth, and promote the Concord [peaceful relations] , and Stability of the Empire.

And your Petitioner shall ever pray &c.

### Explanations:

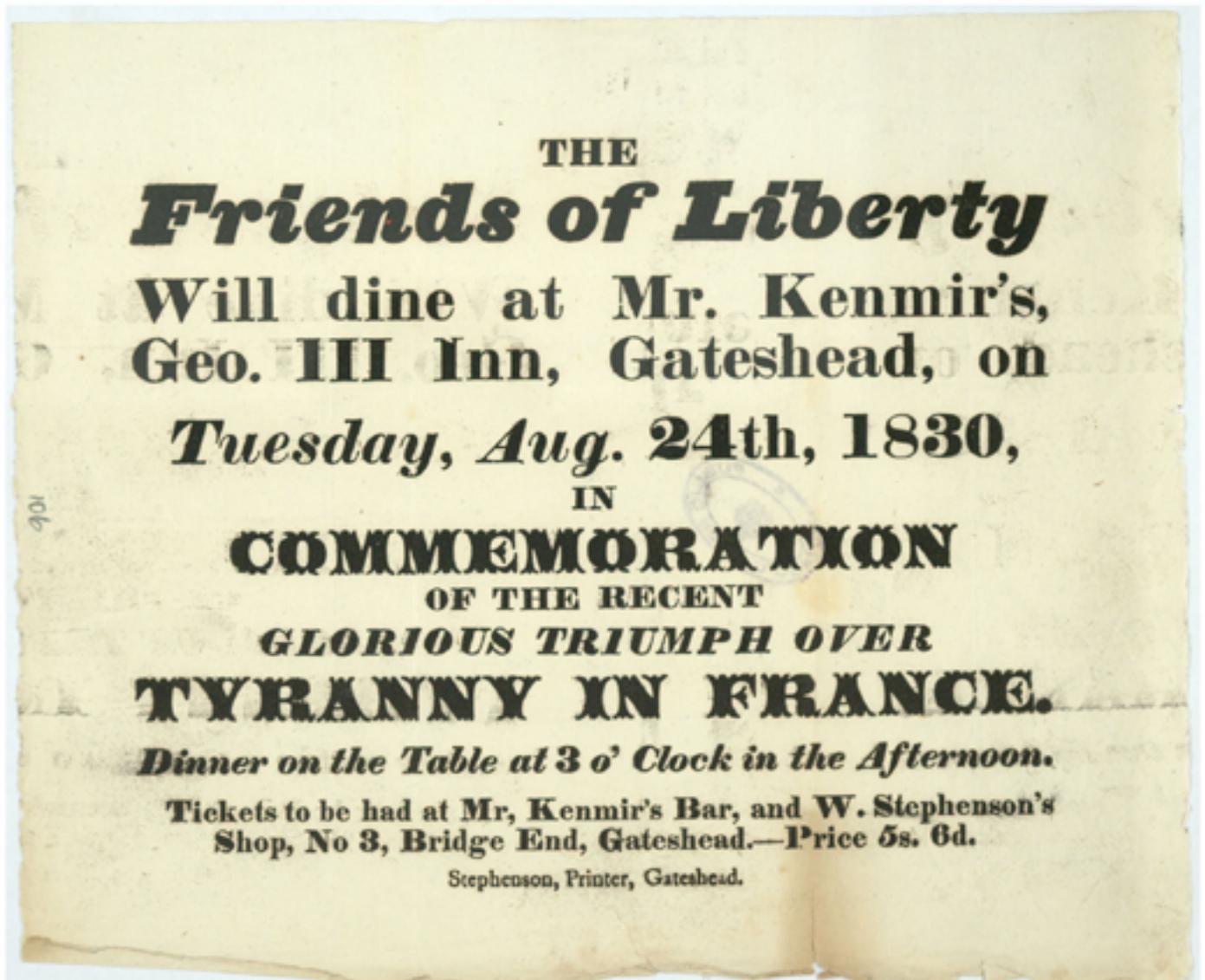
\* Because the property in the area is mostly leasehold, the people writing the petition do not have a vote. [To qualify to vote, you had to own a certain amount of property].

\*\* The people writing the petition don't mean to push any particular ideas on to Parliament as to how as to how the shortcomings of the voting system can best be fixed

\*\*\* They trust in the wisdom and the justice of Parliament to adjust the right to vote as to give to more of their fellow subjects who have enough intelligence to make a wise choice and enough property... to make that choice themselves. [This suggests that a poor person might be tempted to vote a certain way in return for money.]

## Advertisement for a dinner in Gateshead in August 1830

Catalogue Ref: HO 44/21



## Transcript

THE Friends of Liberty Will dine at Mr. Kenmir's, Geo. III Inn, Gateshead, on Tuesday, Aug. 24th, 1830,

IN COMMEMORATION OF THE RECENT GLORIOUS TRIUMPH OVER TYRANNY IN FRANCE.

Dinner on the Table at 3 o' Clock in the Afternoon.

Tickets to be had at Mr Kenmir's Bar, and W. Stephenson's

Shop, No 3, Bridge End, Gateshead – Price 5s. 6d. [5 Shillings and 6 pence]

## Extracts A and B from 'The Bristol Gazette', 3 November 1831

Catalogue Ref: HO 40/28

## SIR CHAS. WETHERELL'S ENTRY INTO BRISTOL.

### **Awful and Calamitous Riots.**

DESTRUCTION BY FIRE OF THE NEW GAOL  
—BRIDEWELL—GLOUCESTER COUNTY PRI-  
SON, (Lawford's Gate)—THE BISHOP'S PALACE—  
THE TOLL HOUSES AND GATES—THE MAN-  
SION-HOUSE—THE CUSTOM-HOUSE—THE  
EXCISE-OFFICE—AND UPWARDS OF FORTY  
HOUSES IN QUEEN-SQUARE, PRINCE'S-  
STREET, &c.

For several weeks there had been a feeling very general amongst many classes in this city—and a feeling shared equally by some of the most respectable individuals in the town—that the continued and perverse opposition of Sir Charles Wetherell to the Reform Bill, and the very gross and intemperate language in which he suffered himself to indulge, designating even the very highest official characters in the country as a set of "blundering, ignorant, unprincipled, and factious demagogues," would lead to a very strong manifestation of feeling towards him on his entry as Recorder into this city. Nothing like violence was, however, we are quite sure, ever contemplated—and nothing like violence, we are equally sure, was evinced throughout the whole of the late deplorable scenes,—by any person who cares a straw about political principles. The injury that has been done, and the ruin that is now written in burning characters on one of the fairest portions of our city, were caused by the lowest creatures, who finding that the course of events indulged them in undisturbed control, gave loose to their passions; and becoming stimulated by plunder, maddened by liquor and rendered secure by non-interposition, resembled rather demons than human beings.

## Transcript: Extracts A and B from 'The Bristol Gazette'

Catalogue Ref: HO 40/28

SIR CHAS. [Charles] WETHERELL'S ENTRY INTO BRISTOL.

Awful and Calamitous Riots [disastrous riots]

DESTRUCTION BY FIRE OF THE NEW GAOL- BRIDEWELL-GLOUCESTER COUNTY PRISON, (Lawford's Gate) –THE BISHOP'S PALACE–THE TOLL HOUSES AND GATES THE MANSION-HOUSE–THE CUSTOM-HOUSE–THE EXCISE-OFFICE–AND UPWARDS OF FORTY HOUSES IN QUEEN-SQUARE, PRINCE'S-STREET, &c.

For several weeks there had been a feeling very general amongst many classes in this city – and a feeling shared equally by some of the most respectable individuals in the town – that the continued and perverse [stubborn] opposition of Sir Charles Wetherell to the Reform Bill, and the very gross and intemperate language [offensive language] in which he suffered himself to indulge, designating even the very highest official characters in the country as a set of “blundering, ignorant, unprincipled, and factious demagogues [leaders who appeal to emotion and prejudice],” would lead to a very strong manifestation [display] of feeling towards him on his entry as Recorder [job as senior judge] into this city. Nothing like violence was, however, we are quite sure, ever contemplated – and nothing like violence, we are equally sure, was evinced [shown] throughout the whole of the late deplorable scenes; – by any person who cares a straw about political principles. The injury that has been done, and the ruin that is now written in burning characters on one of the fairest portions of our city, were caused by the lowest creatures, who finding that the course of events indulged them in undisturbed control, gave loose to their passions; and becoming stimulated by plunder, maddened by liquor and rendered secure [made safe] by non-interposition [lack of anyone intervening], resembled rather demons than human beings.

## Extract C from 'The Bristol Gazette', 3 November 1831

Catalogue Ref: HO 40/28

instead of 3 or 4 in the afternoon. It was also deemed advisable to enrol in a number of special constables for the occasion, some of whom were gentlemen from the different wards, who volunteered their services, and others were individuals hired for the day.—On Saturday morning early this force was accordingly assembled in the area of the Exchange, and each having been provided with a short staff, proceeded to meet Sir Charles at Totterdown, and escort him into the city. It was generally understood at the same time that a body of the military was stationed in the new Cattle Market, near Hills-bridge, and another at the Gaol, ready to act if occasion required. Notwithstanding the change of the usual hour, the streets were crowded with people, thronging towards the Bath-road. At this time it was evident that among the crowd there were many persons ripe for mischief. Of this number, hardly a single individual wore the appearance of a mechanic; they wholly consisted of boys and striplings, persons evidently without stated employment, which the densely populated purlieus of wretchedness and vice in St. Philip's and in the neighbourhood of Lawford's Gate had sent forth on the occasion. Not a few among them were women of abandoned character, and these, by their violent language, seemed well fitted to urge them on to desperation.

At about half-past ten, Sir Charles was perceived to approach, at a rapid rate, in a chariot drawn by four greys, and on stopping at Totterdown for the purpose of being handed into the Sheriff's carriage, he was instantly assailed by the most deafening yells, groans, and hisses. The constables were then,

## Transcript: Extract C from 'The Bristol Gazette'

Catalogue Ref: HO 40/28

It was also deemed advisable to enrol in a number of special constables for the occasion, some of whom were gentlemen from the different wards [parts of the town], who volunteered their services, and others were individuals hired for the day. – On Saturday morning early this force was accordingly assembled in the area of the Exchange, and each having been provided with a short staff [long stick], proceeded to meet Sir Charles at Totterdown, and escort him into the city. It was generally understood at the same time that a body of the military was stationed in the new Cattle Market, near Hills-bridge, and another at the Gaol, ready to act if occasion required. Notwithstanding the change of the usual hour, the streets were crowded with people, thronging towards the Bath-road. At this time it was evident that among the crowd there were many persons ripe for mischief. Of this number, hardly a single individual wore the appearance of a mechanic [skilled worker using tools] ; they wholly consisted of boys and striplings [adolescents], persons evidently without stated employment, which the densely populated purlieu [area near] of wretchedness and vice in St. Philip's and in the neighbourhood of Lawford's Gate had sent forth on the occasion. Not a few among them were women of abandoned [not respectable] character, and these, by their violent language, seemed well fitted to urge them on to desperation.

At about half-past ten, Sir Charles was perceived to approach, at a rapid rate, in a chariot drawn by four greys, and on stopping at Totterdown for the purpose of being handed into the Sheriff's carriage, he was instantly assailed [attacked] by the most deafening yells, groans, and hisses.

## Extract D from 'The Bristol Gazette', 3 November 1831

Catalogue Ref: HO 40/28

themselves.— We firmly believe, from our own observation and from the concurrent testimony of numerous persons of all political principles present, that if it had not been for the very indiscreet zeal of some of the volunteer constables, no further disturbance would have taken place. True it is that some stones—we are sure they did not exceed half-a-dozen—had been thrown, and some very trifling injury had taken place. The constables, however, aided by some very young gentlemen, who loudly made a boast of their principles, charged into the crowd, and made themselves particularly busy in apprehending various individuals, whom they dragged into the Mansion-House, using their staves without mercy. The mob, who at this time were quite unarmed, raised a cry of “To the Back,” where piles of faggots for firewood are usually kept, and in a short time about fifty, principally boys, returned with sticks. A kind of rescue was attempted, which ended in the rout of the mob, and the constables proceeded back in triumph, with bundles of sticks which

## Transcript: Extract D from 'The Bristol Gazette'

Catalogue Ref: HO 40/28

We firmly believe, from our own observation and from the concurrent [agreeing] testimony of numerous persons of all political principles present, that if it had not been for the very indiscreet zeal [energy] of some of the volunteer constables, no further disturbance would have taken place. True it is that some stones – we are sure they did not exceed half-a-dozen – had been thrown, and some very trifling injury had taken place. The constables, however, aided by some very young gentlemen, who loudly made a boast of their principles, charged into the crowd, and made themselves particularly busy in apprehending various individuals, whom they dragged into the Mansion-House, using their staves without mercy. The mob, who at this time were quite unarmed, raised a cry of "To the Back," where piles of faggots [bundles of sticks] for firewood are usually kept, and in a short time about fifty, principally boys, returned with sticks. A kind of rescue was attempted, which ended in the rout of the mob [defeat of the crowd], and the constables proceeded back in triumph.

## Extract E from 'The Bristol Gazette', 3 November 1831

Catalogue Ref: HO 40/28

was renewed with increased effect. A simultaneous attack was made from several quarters on the Mansion-House. The iron-railings in front were torn up like magic, and with these formidable weapons, acting as crow-bars, and with long poles, all the lower windows, the shutters, frames, front and side doors, were beaten in. Where the special constables were at this moment does not appear; certain it is they offered no resistance. A free entrance being gained, the mob proceeded up stairs, and every article of furniture—tables, chairs, glasses, earthen-ware, and the splendid chandeliers—were almost immediately demolished, and the fragments thrown into the street. The beds were thrown out of the windows and taken down and flung into the Float. A portmanteau, containing, we believe, Sir Charles's wearing-apparel, was ransacked of papers and clothes, and then hung up on a lamp-post. The Recorder himself made his escape over the roofs of the houses, succeeded in getting away unnoticed, and left the city for London in the course of the night. If he could possibly have foreseen the scenes of destruction that followed, and of which his entry was the first exciting cause, we envy not his feelings. His name is a subject of universal execration throughout the city.

At this time the mob appeared solely to have turned their thoughts to destruction and to have neglected plunder. They had gone so far as to procure straw and other combustibles with the intention of setting the Mansion-House on fire, when the military arrived from Clifton at a sharp trot, and immediately cleared the front and sides of the Mansion-House, which was thus saved from immediate destruction.

## Transcript: Extract E from 'The Bristol Gazette'

Catalogue Ref: HO 40/28

A simultaneous attack was made from several quarters on the Mansion-House. The iron-railings in front were torn up like magic, and with these formidable weapons, acting as crow-bars, and with long poles, all the lower windows, the shutters, frames, front and side doors, were beaten in. Where the special constables were at this moment does not appear; certain it is they offered no resistance. A free entrance being gained, the mob proceeded up stairs, and every article of furniture – tables, chairs, glasses, earthen-ware, and the splendid chandeliers – were almost immediately demolished, and the fragments thrown into the street. The beds were thrown out of the windows and taken down and flung into the Float. A portmanteau [large bag], containing, we believe, Sir Charles's wearing-apparel, was ransacked of papers and clothes, and then hung up on a lamp-post. The Recorder himself made his escape over the roofs of the houses, succeeded in getting away unnoticed, and left the city for London in the course of the night. If he had possibly foreseen the scenes of destruction that followed, and of which his entry was the first exciting cause, we envy not his feeling. His name is a subject of universal execration [to be detested] throughout the city.

At this time the mob appeared solely to have turned their thoughts to destruction and to have neglected plunder. They had gone so far as to procure straw and other combustibles [things that could burn] with the intention of setting the Mansion-House on fire, when the military arrived from Clifton at a sharp trot, and immediately cleared the front and sides of the Mansion-House, which was thus saved from immediate destruction.

## Extract F from 'The Bristol Gazette', 3 November 1831

Catalogue Ref: HO 40/28

The mob had, in the course of the morning, obtained possession of a quantity of iron-railings, &c. and early in the afternoon a party proceeded, armed with these implements, pickaxes, hatchets, &c. to Bridewell, with the avowed intention of liberating the prisoners that had been committed the preceding day. — The party was far from numerous, but not the slightest molestation was offered them! On reaching Bridewell, they procured a quantity of sledge-hammers from a smiths' shop in the neighbourhood, and immediately commenced an attack on the massive gates. These they soon forced, and thinking that they might be used as barricades against themselves, almost instantaneously destroyed them, throwing the fragments over the wall into the Frome river. After liberating the prisoners, they systematically proceeded to set one wing on fire, and the building was soon in a bright glow. About the same time a much larger party proceeded to the New Gaol, a very strong stone building, erected only a few years ago, at a very great expense. A body of gen-

## Transcript: Extract F from 'The Bristol Gazette'

Catalogue Ref: HO 40/28

The mob had, in the course of the morning, obtained possession of a quantity of iron-railings, &c. and early in the afternoon a party proceeded, armed with these implements, pickaxes, hatchets, &c. to Bridewell, with the avowed [determined] intention of liberating the prisoners that had been committed the preceding day. – The party was far from numerous, but not the slightest molestation [harm] was offered them! On reaching Bridewell, they procured a quantity of sledge-hammers from a smith's shop in the neighbourhood, and immediately commenced an attack on the massive gates. These they soon force, and thinking that they might be used as barricades against themselves, almost instantaneously destroyed them, throwing the fragments over the wall into the Frome River.

After liberating the prisoners, they systematically proceeded to set one wing on fire, and the building was soon in a bright glow. About the same time a much larger party proceeded to the New Gaol, a very strong stone building, erected only a few years ago, at a very great expense.

## Extract G from 'The Bristol Gazette', 3 November 1831

Catalogue Ref: HO 40/28

baffles all calculation. The total damage is estimated by various individuals to amount from 4 to £800,000.

The special constables patrolled the streets during last evening and night. This morning the shops are opened as usual and something like tranquillity is restored. The following bill has been put out by the Magistrates:—

**COUNCIL-HOUSE,***Wednesday, Nov. 2, 1831.*

“The Magistrates most earnestly desire that all Persons will avoid in assembling in Crowds in different Parts of the City, as such assemblages are likely to promote disturbances, and interfere with arrangements now making for the recovery of property and detection of Offenders.

“C. PINNEY, Mayor.”

No further disturbance is apprehended, though the town remains in a state of great excitement, and different parties are earnestly discussing the conduct of the Magistrates and the soldiers. We hold it at this moment best to avoid saying any thing that can tend to promote irritation, knowing that a calm and solemn investigation will soon take place into all the facts connected with this melancholy affair.

---

## Transcript: Extract G from 'The Bristol Gazette'

Catalogue Ref: HO 40/28

... The total damage is estimated by various individuals to amount from 4 [£400,000] to £800,000. The special constables patrolled the streets during the last evening and night. This morning the shops are opened as usual and something like tranquillity is restored. The following bill has been put out by the Magistrates.

### COUNCIL-HOUSE

Wednesday, Nov. 2 1831

"The Magistrates most earnestly desire that all Persons will avoid assembling in Crowds in different Parts of the City, as such assemblages [gatherings] are likely to promote disturbances, and interfere with arrangements now making for the recovery of property and detection of Offenders. "C. PINNEY, Mayor."

No further disturbance is apprehended [expected], though the town remains in a state of great excitement, and different parties are earnestly discussing the conduct of the Magistrates and the soldiers. We hold it at this moment best to avoid saying anything that can tend to promote irritation, knowing that a calm and solemn investigation will soon take place into all the facts connected with this melancholy [sad] affair.



## Why do our hyperlinks come with footnotes?

Our resources are designed to be printed and used in classrooms, which means hyperlinks aren't always accessible digitally. We include the full link at the bottom of the page so that you can type in the address without distracting from the main text of the lesson materials.

## Did you know?

The National Archives Education Service also offers free workshops onsite in Kew and online in your classroom.

Our [Onsite Workshops](#) are available for free here at The National Archives and allow students to experience genuine original documents reflecting over 1000 years of history. From Elizabeth I's signature to the telegrams of the sinking Titanic, students love the wow-factor of being able to see real history on the desk in front of them.

Our [Online Workshops](#) allow our Education Officers to teach through your projector, leading discussions and guiding students through activities based around original documents. All you need is a computer with a projector, webcam and microphone. We'll arrange a test call before your session to check the tech is working.

---

## Find out more:

 [nationalarchives.gov.uk/education](https://nationalarchives.gov.uk/education)

 [education@nationalarchives.gov.uk](mailto:education@nationalarchives.gov.uk)

[facebook.com/TheNationalArchivesEducationService](https://facebook.com/TheNationalArchivesEducationService)

[twitter.com/UKNatArcEdu](https://twitter.com/UKNatArcEdu)