

DERBY AND DERBYSHIRE DURING THE GREAT REFORM BILL CRISIS, 1830-1832

By J. WIGLEY
(Haberdashers' Aske's School, Elstree, Herts.)

Since J. R. M. Butler Published *The Passing of the Great Reform Bill* in 1914 most historians have dealt primarily with the impact of the crisis on the lives of prominent politicians, or the popular disorder involved and the issue of whether or not it had a revolutionary potential. Local studies have concentrated either upon highly industrial areas such as Merthyr or great cities such as Manchester, whose conditions cannot give a well-balanced picture of England in 1832. This article aims to examine an area which boasted of politicians of some eminence and in which serious popular disorder took place; but which deserves attention because the interests which it contained (the Whig Cavendishes led by the Duke of Devonshire, the Tory Gentry, a number of influential commercial families, and the groups of voters cajoled and wooed by each) reflect more accurately the nature of English political life at the time of the Great Reform Bill.¹

The crisis began in Parliament. In 1827 the Tories were shaken by the resignation of their leader, Lord Liverpool, who had been Prime Minister since 1812, split by Canning's brief premiership, and humiliated by Lord Goderich's debacle. By 1829 his successor, the Duke of Wellington, was in trouble with a divided party. Modification of the Corn Law had not satisfied the 'liberal' Tories, led by Huskisson, and Catholic Emancipation had estranged the 'ultras', led by Sir Charles Wetherell.²

The dissolution and general election made necessary by the death of George IV in June 1830 gave Wellington a chance to fight for a decisive personal majority, so he used the Treasury's influence to the utmost. This tactic failed, for the opposite wings of his party united against him and independent electors, alienated by years of economic misfortune, called for a reform of Parliament in order to protect themselves from domination by a Treasury-based oligarchy.³

Before the election was over news of the July Revolution in France swept through England, and in the autumn rick-burning in the south and strikes in the north kept the country in a state of alarm and excitement. Parliament met on 1 November and during the debate on the Address the next day Wellington declared that he was opposed to Reform. The Whigs, the 'liberal' and the 'ultra' Tories united against him and on 15 November he was defeated in the Commons on a division over the Civil List. The new king, William IV, invited the Whig leader, Earl Grey, to form a government.⁴

Derby and Derbyshire shared in the growing sense of national crisis. During January 1831 the *Derby Mercury* carried reports of rick-burning in nearby villages, told how window-breaking was rife in the town, and lamented the ineffectiveness of the nightly watch. A Breadsall school-master, Samuel Rowbottom, told that 'There are a number of incendiary fires. . . in consequence of the labourers becoming dissatisfied with their wages.' An anonymous Derby diarist recorded how in January the town suffered from serious flooding, how in July the populace went in fear of cholera, and how in August 'Many farmers dare not employ the Irish, lest in revenge the English labourers fire their stacks.' He noted Lord John Russell's introduction of a Reform Bill on behalf of the Whig Cabinet, decided that Derby was 'in favour of Reform' and exercised his political rights: 'County Election of Lord William Cavendish whose grandfather Lord George is called to the Upper House and now Earl Burlington. Dinners at six Inns (including the) Fox and Owl. At the latter I dined with about 100. . . a most excellent dinner and well-cooked.'⁵

The district's political life had been deeply influenced by the Cavendish family since

1688 when William Cavendish had supported William of Orange, being created first Duke of Devonshire in 1694. The Cavendishes were the dominant interest in the county, but knew that there was a rough balance between their estates in the north and those of the Tory gentry in the south. There were traditionally few differences of principle between the two camps and there were some 3,000 voters, so in order to avoid the antagonism and expense of an election the Cavendishes were happy to hold one seat, as they did from 1734 to 1830, leaving the second to the Tory gentry, who were represented by a member of the Curzon family from 1701 to 1761 and from 1774 to 1784. In the borough Cavendish power usually extended to both seats by virtue of their influence over the Corporation (in 1830 the sixth Duke was Lord Lieutenant of the County and Lord High Steward of the Corporation) and the latter's power, granted by a Charter in 1680, to create freemen and hence manipulate the franchise.⁶

In 1830 the sitting M.P.'s for the county were Lord George Cavendish, the Duke's uncle, and Francis Mundy, a Tory landowner from Markeaton. Both were re-elected unopposed, but many independent freeholders and several known Tory supporters spoke out for Parliamentary reform at the nomination.⁷

The sitting M.P.'s for the borough were Col. H. F. C. Cavendish, third son of Lord George, and Samuel Crompton, a Whig linked by his banking interests to the Evans family who owned the cotton mill at Darley Abbey, and by blood to the Radical Dr. P. Crompton who had unsuccessfully contested Nottingham in 1796, 1807 and 1812. The dissolution gave Crompton an opportunity to stand down and Edward Strutt was brought forward to replace him. Strutt had impeccable credentials. He was a grandson of the pioneer cotton spinner, had been educated at Eton and Trinity College Cambridge, where he was President of the Union, had studied Law at Lincoln's Inn and the Temple. Now, aged twenty nine, he was taking his uncle Joseph's advice and using his fortune to build up a Liberal interest.⁸

It seemed that the election would proceed in the borough's Cavendish dominated tradition. There was no opposition to Col. Cavendish or Edward Strutt. There were very close links between them. At the nomination Joseph Strutt spoke for Col. Cavendish, J. B. Crompton, mayor in 1829, and W. J. Lockett, the Duke's electoral agent, who had previously backed Samuel Crompton, proposed Strutt. The two candidates were supported by the *Derby Mercury*, whose owner-editor, John Drewry, was (like Joseph and Edward Strutt and Lockett) a member of the Corporation and his son, John jnr., both a member and its Treasurer.⁹

Despite this, Lockett deferred to feeling in the town by introducing Strutt as a man of political principles — an opponent of 'ministerial influence' — and in contrast to Col. Cavendish's staccato statement that he was for Derby and against the slave trade Strutt outlined an advanced Liberal programme. He introduced a new element into the borough by declaring 'I consider it to be one of the most encouraging signs of the present times, that public opinion is daily acquiring greater influence over the opinions of the legislature and the measures of government.'¹⁰

Once in Parliament Strutt expected great things of the new House and wrote dejectedly to his wife 'The King's Speech is a bad one, containing nothing about Reform or political improvement of any kind.' He sat on the back opposition benches amidst a rather isolated group of Radicals and Liberals, but Lord George and Col. Cavendish introduced him into society and Lord Althorp, a Whig leader, proposed him for membership of Brooks's Club.

He witnessed the manoeuvres behind Wellington's defeat and told his wife 'Sir Roger (Gresley of Drakelow, Tory MP for Durham City) after all his professions of economy, voted with (the) ministers, his patron Lord Londonderry having got the promise of a regiment. Lord George and Col. Cavendish were both absent. I cannot tell you much about the new ministry, but I suppose it will be known pretty soon. I hear that it is to consist exclusively of the Whigs and the remains of the Huskisson party and to contain no ultra Tories. . . . Parliamentary reform they say is to be a Cabinet measure.'¹¹

By February 1831 Strutt's spirits had sunk again — 'The new ministers as yet have, as I feared, done little to satisfy the public. We must wait to see their reform measure.'

However, on 2 March he wrote excitedly 'You will see that the ministers have proposed a literally sweeping measure of reform — a much more extensive and better one than I think was expected by anybody. It has no doubt great defects, but if it is carried (as it must be eventually) all the rest must follow. It has of course horrified a great proportion of the House, and I have no expectation that they can carry the measure in its present shape through the present Parliament, but I hope they will not permit it to be frittered away, and if they remain firm it must be carried at last. People are of course speculating on the chances of a dissolution.' The Reform Bill passed the second reading on 23 March, but was then narrowly defeated in committee on 20 April.¹²

The *Derby Mercury* had informed the county and the borough alike about the Bill, reported its progress in the Commons, welcomed the proposed creation of two new county seats; and supported the measure as a whole on the impeccably moderate ground that 'the King and a great portion of the Aristocracy' did so. In fact, the Cavendishes were in a dilemma, being traditionally Whig, yet major beneficiaries of the unreformed system. The Duke had held office under Canning and Earl Grey only secured his support by giving him the post of Lord Chamberlain. He viewed Reform with suspicion, but in June 1830 had observed the emergence of pro-Reform feeling in his pocket borough at Knaresborough, and in November had been advised by Lord George to support 'moderate Reform. . . to satisfy the County'. He eventually decided to do so, agreed to call a County Meeting to discuss the Bill, and gave Strutt the impression that he was 'delighted at the state of affairs in Derbyshire'.¹³

The Duke spoke at the County Meeting on 8 March 1831, explaining that he was prepared to give up aristocratic privileges such as pocket boroughs, which caused friction between the aristocracy and the people, willing to place his faith in the natural relationship which existed between them, and happy to connect himself with that very 'cordial and independent body. . . the yeomen of the County of Derby.' The meeting was certainly in favour of the Reform Bill. The High Sheriff, Sir C. R. Colville, had to beg the freeholders to give a solitary anti-Reformer a fair hearing and 'answer his objections by arguments, not by semi-barbarous clamour.' Colville then himself spoke for the Bill and was supported by several other members of the Tory gentry, including Sir George Crewe of Calke, H. S. Wilmot of Chaddesden and P. Gell of Hopton. Two framework knitters, Messrs. Kerry and Deakin, gave their support. A Borough Meeting held a few days later showed a similar degree of unanimity: the Mayor, the Rev. C. S. Hope, pledged the Corporation's support, Joseph Strutt and J. B. Crompton spoke for the men of property, and the Rev. J. Gawthorn for the town's Nonconformists.¹⁴

Strutt had kept himself informed about events in Derbyshire, had been in touch with Lockett and had used W. L. Newton (another member of the Corporation, who had spoken at the Borough Meeting, and later became a director of the Midland Counties Railway) as his personal political agent; telling his wife 'Mr. Mundy. . . is in the greatest possible difficulty about his vote. He approves of Reform, but objects to a considerable amount of the Bill and wishes to know what is thought of it in Derbyshire. I wrote to Mr. Lockett yesterday partly for the purpose of giving him a hint that it will be desirable to assist Mr. M. in making up his mind.'¹⁵

Strutt had booked himself a seat on the mail coach to Derby as soon as the Bill had been defeated, and once William IV had accepted Earl Grey's advice to dissolve Parliament and call a general election threw himself into the business of electioneering. He need hardly have bothered for his position was secure. Joseph Strutt and W. L. Newton proposed Col. Cavendish, who did not specifically commit himself to support the Bill, and D. Forester and D. Fox (a member of a famous engineering family related to the Strutts by marriage) proposed Edward Strutt, who did so commit himself. Both candidates were returned unopposed.¹⁶

The county election was a more intricate affair. Although the *Derby Mercury* had reported that Lord George had not voted at the second reading, he spoke out for the Bill when and where necessary, so met no opposition. Francis Mundy had voted for the Bill at the second reading, but against it in committee, offending anti- and pro-Reform Tories, so was expected to stand down. Lockett feared that if he do so local Whigs would put up a

candidate in addition to Lord George — 'From what I can see it will not be an easy matter to prevent the Whigs from setting up a second candidate' — leading to charges that one interest was trying to dominate the county; yet needed a candidate to keep out Thomas Gisborne, a member of an old Derbyshire family, in 1830 Radical M.P. for Stafford, who was thinking of standing in Derbyshire.¹⁷

On 26 April Lord Waterpark (H.M. Cavendish, the Duke's nominee for Knaresborough, who lived at Doveridge) sounded out George Vernon, whose father, Lord Vernon, had a considerable estate at nearby Sudbury: "Today I was sitting in my room when Waterpark was announced — as soon as he had shut the door he said 'George, we want you to go down to Derbyshire. We hear that Gisborne is going to stand and we don't like him. He is not a respectable person, and in case Mundy resigns and no Tory who will support the Bill should offer himself we much have you.'"¹⁸

Two days later Lockett knew that neither Mundy nor Gisborne would stand and told the Duke about 'The meeting of the Tories at Chaddesden yesterday. . . Sir George Crewe was present and he was proposed as a proper candidate, but Lord Scarsdale (from Kedleston, the head of the Curzon family) in a letter and Sir Henry Fitzherbert personally, declared their opinion that he was not enough of a Tory for them. Mr. Arkwright, who was also present, was invited, but. . . declined the honour. The meeting separated without coming to any conclusion.' Vernon therefore stood to fill the vacancy, was nobly if unknowingly supported by Gisborne, and was returned alongside Lord George without the trouble of a contest.¹⁹

Lockett kept the organisations of Vernon and Lord George strictly separate and the Duke refrained from supporting Vernon, acting in accordance with 'My rule of not interfering in the choice of the second member for the county.' Despite this care the electors were offended and in May, June and July the *Derby Mercury* carried a series of letters from anonymous 'Freeholders' complaining about the use of undue influence and asserting their right to independent representation in Parliament. In July a group of freeholders which included members of the Cocker family, who had a pin mill at Hathersage, met in Buxton and founded an 'Association for Promoting the Purity of Elections.'²⁰

Nationally, the general election led to the widespread defeat of anti-reform candidates and the Whigs were returned with a commanding majority. On 24 June the Whig Cabinet reintroduced the Reform Bill in the Commons and on 7 July it passed the second reading by 367 to 231. It was assumed that this guaranteed its eventual success, so preparations were made for a general election in accordance with its provisions. In the county Gresley, Crewe, Gisborne, Lord George and Waterpark issued Addresses and set up Committees, and one enterprising landlord even advertised 'Thirty votes for the County of Derby. To be sold in lots of one or more each.' In the borough 308 citizens designated themselves '£10 Householders' when asking Sir Charles Colville to stand as their candidate.²¹

When the House of Lords proved reluctant to pass the Bill Earl Grey sought to secure a majority there by persuading William IV to enoble suitable Whigs. Lord George was therefore given an earldom and resigned the representation of Derbyshire, necessitating a by-election. As a replacement the Cavendishes proposed Lord William Cavendish, Lord George's grandson and heir, the Duke's eventual successor. He then resigned his seat for Malton (another of the Duke's Yorkshire boroughs) and was introduced to the electors. He blithely denounced the corrupt borough system and listened to the local Whigs who encouraged the freeholders to remember the events of 1688, revere the principles of their ancestors and 'restore the constitution to its ancient splendour.'²²

At another County Meeting, held a few days after Lord William's unopposed return, he called on the Lords to show their 'true nobility' by passing the Bill. This proved too much for Sir Charles Colville and Sir George Crewe who alluded to the Cavendishes by exhorting the freeholders to recover their ancient elective rights from aristocratic usurpation. William Evans, Liberal MP for Leicestershire, told them to assert their rights over the King and his parvenu aristocracy. Thomas Gisborne retained his reputation as a Radical by dropping hints about the non-payment of taxes, but recalled their common interest by explaining how 'political unions sprang up and leaders have been found for them and if we continue to deny them political power the mass of the people of England, who by property and power

are entitled to it, will unite against us.' As if in reply, Kerry assured the meeting that the lower classes favoured Reform and the protection of property.²³

Such was the state of articulate political feeling in Derby and Derbyshire when the Lords prepared to close their debate on the second reading of the Reform Bill on Friday 7 October 1831. On Saturday night a crowd gathered in the Market Place to await the arrival of the mail coach from London to Manchester, and as it drew to a halt learned that the Bill had been defeated by 199 to 158 in the early hours of the morning. Men immediately ran to the parish churches and tolled slow muffled peals as if in mourning. At 10.00pm a large crowd in the Market Place wrecked the house and shop of William Bemrose, a Tory anti-Reformer who owned and edited the *Derbyshire Courier*. Members of the crowd stoned the Mayor's house, similarly treated that of Thomas Mozley, a Tory solicitor, and then smashed the windows of several more shops and houses before travelling out of town to attack the mansions of Mundy at Markeaton and Wilmot at Chaddesden.²⁴

After dispersing at dawn on Sunday the crowd re-appeared and invaded a Reform Meeting held in the Town Hall at 9.00am, reduced it to confusion, and demanded the release of three men arrested and imprisoned during the night. When this was refused by the Mayor it marched to the Town Gaol, broke in the door with a cast-iron lamp-post and released 23 prisoners, and moved on to the County Gaol. At this point Gisborne rode up, but the crowd disregarded his pleas for calm and was not checked until the Governor, who feared that his prisoners might mutiny, ordered the wardens to fire a volley from the walls. As darkness fell on Sunday night a crowd of some 1,500 people assembled in the Market Place, smashed the remaining gas-lights and stoned houses in the northern, partly residential, part of the town until a troop of the Fifteenth Hussars arrived from Nottingham and cleared the streets.²⁵

On Monday morning the Mayor had hand-bills distributed, announcing that Petitions to the King, calling on him to force the Bill through the Lords, lay for signature on stalls in the Market Place. Another large crowd, swollen by the influx of country people for the annual Cattle Fair, which began that day, quickly formed and some of its members started to destroy the stalls. The Mayor then read the Riot Act, the Hussars moved into action, and the streets were cleared again. During the day several local troops of Yeomanry rode into the town, enabling the Corporation to have the streets patrolled, and giving it the opportunity to declare a curfew. The High Sheriff mounted a guard of his Javelin Men outside the county Gaol, and when the anxious Lord Lieutenant arrived at the County Hall at 3.00am on Wednesday morning Derby was quiet.²⁶

The disorder shocked and perhaps unnerved local opinion. The *Derby Mercury* ran a headline 'Violent Outrages in Derby and Neighbourhood.' Samuel Rowbottom, at nearby Breadsall, confided to his diary that the Tory squire, Robert Wilmot-Horton (MP for Newcastle-under-Lyme, 1818 to 1830, Parliamentary Under Secretary for the Colonies, 1821 to 1828) fled south of the Trent to the Crewe mansion at Calke when rumours of a visit from the rioters reached him. Rowbottom noted how on Tuesday 'at 7pm the children coming from the Mill at Darley commenced shouting on their approach to the village and the alarm was spread. . . that the rioters were coming. This roused the timid people to run in every direction and to hide themselves and their property.' A business correspondent of the Wyatt family of Bakewell wrote agitatedly 'In the present state of things here buying lead is quite out of the question. . . the writer's windows are all shattered to pieces, the Town Gaol broken open and the threatenings are dreadful — you shall hear from us again when we dare purchase, but our letter of yesterday is not to be regarded in any way.'²⁷

The cost of the disorder was high. Over thirty householders claimed a total compensation of over £300 from the Corporation whilst both William Bemrose and Francis Mundy sued it in the courts. The motive and composition of the crowd is harder to determine. It is clear that political excitement on the night of Saturday 8 October touched off the disorder. One man was seen reading out to the crowd a 'Resolution to the King' and another man was later accused of shouting 'Reform! Reform!' as he smashed gas-lamps. The *Derby Mercury* drew a distinction between the 'respectable' who supported the Mayor and Corporation at the meeting on Sunday morning and the 'populace' who disrupted it. Rowbottom himself described the crowd in the Market Place on Saturday night as

consisting 'chiefly of the lower and middle class of people.' The anonymous diarist, who watched much of the trouble from a friend's house, stigmatised the crowd late on Saturday night as a 'lawless mob' and recounted that in the early hours of Sunday morning 'plunder seemed to be the sole object with these misguided wretches.'²⁸

There is other, more detailed and more objective, evidence from which it is possible to assess the crowd's motives. An analysis of the thirty six claims for damages made to the Corporation reveals that the crowd divided its window-breaking attentions almost equally between the adherents of the political parties — six Whigs, seven Tories and two men who split their votes in 1835, which is the nearest election for which poll books are available. However, an examination of the thirty six using Glover's *Directory* as a guide shows that they included at least four grocers, two victuallers, a miller, a corn-factor, a cheese-monger, a butcher, a confectioner, a 'shop-keeper', two hosiers and an iron-founder. They also included an Alderman, the Corporation's Chaplain (the Mayor's brother), the Clerk to the Magistrates and the Clerk to the Lord Lieutenant; besides J. B. Crompton and the Drewrys.²⁹

An analysis of the proceedings which followed the disorder reveals further information about the crowd's composition. At the inquests (one man was shot outside the County Gaol, one crushed in the Market Place, and one shot by an Hussar) it was said that the disorder was accentuated by drink and one account claimed that the crowd on Sunday consisted 'principally of boys and women, followed by a number of men 'who were led by a 'young man of about twenty employed at one of the silk mills.' On the other hand, the sixteen men brought for trial were aged between 17 and 34, which implies that they, at least, might have had political ideas of their own. Although their social position remains obscure — one was a farmer's labourer, one was married with three children and may have been a labourer, and one may have been a joiner — the witnesses included two labourers, a whitesmith, a fitter-up, a tailor, a carter, two paper-makers, a working jeweller and a publican. It was also noted that 'a great many respectable inhabitants' watched the Town Gaol broken open.³⁰

Taken together with what we know of the course of the disorder, and allowing for the possible bias and inaccuracy of eye-witness accounts, this suggests that the motive and composition of the crowd passed through a number of stages and that different motives inspired different people. After the attacks on Bemrose and Mozley the middle and lower classes diverged, the former accepting the Corporation's lead of meeting and petitioning. The latter then themselves split in order to travel out of town in different directions to Markeaton and Chellaston, and after the attacks there specifically party political motives receded into the background. They were initially replaced by a desire to rescue the prisoners, but as the crowd's composition changed again so did its motives, the lower orders demonstrating their dislike of the town's provision merchants and their resentment of its oligarchical rulers. thus there was not one motive, but many issues; and not one crowd, but several groups.

The district's longer term reaction to the disorder was largely determined by the fact that the Corporation was incapable of preserving law and order. The Town Gaoler released two men before the Gaol was attacked, neither Police nor Watch appeared, and only J. B. Crompton, who rode to Nottingham to fetch the Hussars, and B. T. Balguy, the Town Clerk, seemed capable of taking decisive action. On Sunday Balguy had sent an urgent letter to Major Buckley of the Fifteenth Hussars in Nottingham, asking him to hold his men in readiness, and had written to Lord Melbourne, the Home Secretary. On Monday he informed Melbourne that 'The tumultuous assemblage of persons, if they have not increased, have certainly not diminished since the arrival of the military.' He must have worried Melbourne by writing on Tuesday that 'The tumult in this town has continued throughout the night. . . one of the rioters has been killed and others badly wounded. . . I am desired by the Mayor and Magistrates to request in the most urgent manner that your Lordship will give immediate orders for military assistance to be forwarded them, the Civil Power being wholly inadequate to repress the riots.'³¹

By then the Hussars, who had made their name at the 'Peterloo Massacre' in

Manchester in 1819, had been in Derby for two days. On Sunday the anonymous diarist described how they 'succeeded in securing the streets after hurting many with the backs of their swords.' On Monday he recorded how the crowd was 'a very formidable body in the Market Place, and collected together in knots, no doubt discussing their further proceeding. When the Hussars were ordered to form a Square. . . they did not disperse. The orders were then 'Charge' when such a scene of scrambling and running ensued that was never before witnessed in Derby. The place was immediately empty. (A). . . man was coming out of the Greyhound. . . (a) soldier ordered him away, the man was exceedingly insolent and not for moving, when the soldier fired and felled him to the ground. This appeared rather to check their ardour.'³²

The inhabitants of nearby villages took a different attitude, and it was widely believed that 'the soldiers were all drunk and behaved in a very brutal manner.' Balguy, who was Coroner as well as Town Clerk, therefore managed the inquests with great care, and the Rev Gawthorn testified to the Hussars' 'great propriety', enabling him to report to Lord Melbourne 'I hope and believe the verdicts will give complete satisfaction.' Melbourne hoped to rely on the regular activities of the authorities in order to prevent further violence, but they remained ineffective.³³

He advised the Mayor not to allow the 'respectable householders' to form their own 'Association for Keeping the Peace' because he feared all organisations which chose their own officers and were independent of the civil power. Balguy sent muskets to the Town Gaol, but early in November observed that 'the working classes. . . continue in a state of great anxiety', so made desperate efforts to raise a force of Special Constables. Their value was reduced by the partizan character ascribed to them by public opinion — they were dubbed 'Conservative Police' — so on 19 November the Mayor arranged for the Royal Marines 'to be in readiness at the moment's notice' and Balguy entered into arrangements with Sir Charles Paget, the Master General of the Board of Ordnance, to equip a barracks for 120 troops. Not until the end of the month when the Hussars began to leave the town did the middle classes move to defend themselves by subscribing to the Derby and Chaddesden Troop of Yeomanry Cavalry, to whose support rallied the Cromptons, William Evans, Edward Strutt, two members of the Corporation and several anti-reformers.³⁴

Things were a little better in the county. Wilmot reported to Lord Melbourne that the villagers 'had entered into a resolution not to be sworn (as Specials) from a feeling that they were likely to be ordered from home into adjoining Counties', but Lord Vernon had pressed him to take strong measures in order to 'produce a salutary feeling of awe.' Mundy pressed him for advice on how to train and arm a band of Specials, won his approval — 'Every effort should be made to combine and unite the loyal and well-disposed inhabitants. . . in such a manner as may enable them to secure their own property and suppress the lawless and evil-minded' — and elicited, provided they were paid for, the issue of two dozen hand-grenades.³⁵

During the winter the 'gentry, professional men, farmers and others' formed a troop of cavalry in Wirksworth whilst the gentry and nobility drew the social fabric together by traditional means: 'A capital fat beast and a proportionate quantity of bread was distributed. . . to the inhabitants of Markeaton and Mackworth. . . the gift of Francis Mundy.' Lady Vernon distributed eighty tons of coal and the Duke of Rutland invited his tenants to Belvoir to celebrate his fifty third birthday.³⁶

On 13 March 1832 the sixty strong troop of Derby Cavalry paraded from the county Gaol to the Market Place, and two days later the Lent Assizes were opened for the trial of the sixteen prisoners. However, only two of them were sentenced to imprisonment, and that for larceny, and the cases against almost all of the others were either abandoned by the prosecution, to cheers from the body of the Court, or collapsed because of lack of positive identification. The defending lawyers, who were provided by public subscription, implied that the principal witness for the prosecution was a hired man, but the Judge commented that the shortage of respectable witnesses for the prosecution, despite many such having observed the disorder, indicated that they either had a 'criminal sympathy with those actively engaged or that they were afraid to appear

against them.³⁷

The national reaction to the disorder was complex and is difficult to isolate from that which took place almost simultaneously in Nottingham and a few weeks later in Bristol. The King wrote to Lord Melbourne regretting 'the spirit that is said to prevail in the neighbourhood of Nottingham and Derby.' Sir Robert Peel, the leader of the Tories in the Commons, feared for the safety of his children near Tamworth 'with Birmingham political unions on one side, and Derby and Nottingham on the other.' Brougham, the Lord Chancellor, warned that 'proceedings of violence and outrage' would jeopardise the success of Reform, but the Tories accused Grey of leading the country into danger by introducing the Bill, raising the expectations of the people, and failing to maintain order.³⁸

In fact, Grey had intended the Bill to satisfy public opinion whilst rationalising and safeguarding the existing political system. He had not anticipated that the Lords would go so far as to defeat the Bill but reacted to defeat and disorder by pressing on with Reform whilst taking due precautions. Thus as early as 18 October 1831 he had published an open letter in *The Times* promising a 'not less efficient' Bill, on 22 November the King had issued a Proclamation against political unions on military lines, and on 12 December a new Reform Bill had been introduced into the Commons.³⁹

Informed opinion in Derbyshire agreed with this course. The Duke of Devonshire had sent Melbourne letters from Lockett and Joseph Strutt to indicate the dangerous state of popular feeling in the county, and as early as 14 October Sir Charles Colville had told him that 'till a Reform Bill has passed we shall be living over a mine which may at any moment explode. . . a systematic power of opposition will be encouraged which will not easily be dissolved and which will dictate to the government and control its measures for years to come.' Unfortunately, the Strutt letters are silent until 20 February 1832 when Edward wrote to his wife 'On Saturday I dined with Ellis, the Secretary to the Treasury. . . That, you see, is what one gets by patient servility to His Majesty's ministers. The prospect of the Reform Bill's passing is I think generally thought to be improving.'⁴⁰

The new Bill passed the third reading in the Commons on 22 March and entered the Lords four days later. Strutt kept his wife informed of its progress there and assumed that its success was assured when it passed the third reading on 14 April. The Whig government's defeat on 7 May on Lord Lyndhurst's motion to postpone the disenfranchising clauses thus came as a bitter surprise and when the King refused to create enough Peers to reverse the defeat the Cabinet resigned. However, Strutt was asked to second Althorp (since November 1830 Leader of the House) on the Address, and on 10 May he established his Parliamentary reputation with a short but strongly anti-Tory speech.⁴¹

John Strutt wrote telling him that 'most of the respectable' citizens in Derby had sent another petition to the King, and stressed that the mood of 'the people' threatened 'the most dreadful consequences' if the Bill was not passed. Opinion in Derby was certainly excited again, but on 15 May Wellington advised the King to recall Grey, who returned to office with full authority to nominate peers, so the Bill was given a third reading on 4 June.⁴²

The Mayor and Magistrates responded by begging householders not to stir up popular feeling by illuminating their windows in celebration, but during the succeeding weeks the borough and county were given over to a series of public feasts in which post Reform celebrations were barely distinguishable from preparations for the impending general election. Derby's employers granted the trade societies a day's holiday to parade through the streets, and Edward Strutt assured the 1,600 who sat down to a free meal that 'the result of this momentous struggle would afford a proof to the men in the possession of power, that however great, it became as nothing when opposed to the will of the people.'⁴³

The county had been divided into a northern and a southern division, each with two seats. The Cavendishes thought their influence sufficient to return two Whigs in the north, wanting Lord William and George Vernon to oppose Gisborne, and were

content for Waterpark to share the south with a Tory. However, Vernon was reluctant to oppose Gisborne, loath to stand as nominee, and confident of carrying the south on his own account, so announced his candidature there. In the event, Lord William and Gisborne stood as Whigs in the north, opposing Sir George Sitwell of Renishaw, who claimed to be an independent gentleman rather than a Tory; and in the south Waterpark and Vernon were opposed by Sir Roger Gresley, who had united the pro- and anti-Reform Tories.⁴⁴

Reform appeared to be a major issue with the candidates and the voters. William Evans recommended Vernon because he was a 'true reformer' and Gresley tactfully accepted the Reform Act by disavowing 'Old Toryism.' Another issue was the independence of the county. When Lord William and Gisborne defeated Sitwell they were still accused of collusion and depending on the Duke of Devonshire's votes alone. John Strutt presented Waterpark as independent of the Cavendish interest, but Gresley denied that, and cast himself as the champion of the agricultural interest, yet failed to counter rumours that he was the Marquis of Londonderry's man, so was defeated.⁴⁵

Reform was in fact valued in so far as it contributed to the county's independence, but was not intended or expected to lead to wider changes. At the declaration of the poll Waterpark and Vernon rejoiced that the old system of nomination and uncontested elections had been ended and the voters given a free choice, but defended the Chandos Clause (which gave the vote to the £50 tenant farmers, and was expected to consolidate the landlords' influence) and refused to pledge themselves to specific policies.⁴⁶

The borough election was a relatively simple affair. Col. Cavendish made a perfunctory reference to 'abuses which may have crept into our institutions' whilst Edward Strutt again put forward an elaborate programme and asked the voters to judge him on that and on his fidelity to it. A third candidate appeared in the person of Sir Charles Colville who stood as a moderate Tory, pledged to free Derby from domination by the Cavendishes, the Corporation and the Strutts. He made an effective anti-Cavendish speech at the nomination and won the traditional 'show of hands' but was defeated at the poll.⁴⁷

The election stimulated a notable increase in political activity and awareness. In the northern county division, the quietest of the three constituencies, Gisborne virulently attacked Tories and Toryism, and was supported by an anonymous Chesterfield satirist. In the south, the non-electors pelted Gresley with rubbish when he first entered Derby, so he returned on election day guarded by 200 mounted tenants. In the borough itself, the people vexed Strutt by challenging him to declare his position on the payment of wages by Truck and on child labour. A short-lived polemical magazine suggested that the Reform Act had given the lower classes a share in nominating candidates, but had confided to the middle classes 'almost wholly, the liberties and prosperity of the community.'⁴⁸

The 1832 general election was untypical of those which preceded and succeeded it, being the outcome of two years of crisis. Thus the Cavendishes had failed to select the candidates or to avoid a contest, and were worried by the decline of personal and the rise of party feeling, which was shown most simply by the *Derby Mercury's* use of 'Whig' and 'Tory' for the first time when reporting elections; but they had benefited from the pro-Reform euphoria, used the £50 tenant farmers to check the freeholders, and overwhelmed the Tory gentry.

Once the election was over, political passions soon cooled and the 'natural' balance of forces re-asserted itself. The Cavendishes lost control of the southern county division in 1835, but dominated the northern until 1867, and Strutt represented the borough of Derby until unseated for bribery in 1847. Hence the tower built on Stanton Moor as a memorial to Earl Grey remained a landmark, rather than an indicator of a turning point in the district's political life.

However, the disorder of October 1831, and that at Nottingham and Bristol, entered into history as the Reform Bill Riots. In 1914 J. R. M. Butler very cautiously and wisely suggested that 'The exact relation of these acts of disorder to the popular desire for

reform is somewhat complicated' but later historians have been much more definitive in their verdict. George Rudé argued that the riots frightened the middle class reformers, causing them to abandon a plan to unleash the people in order to intimidate the Tories. E. P. Thompson regarded the riots as something between 'great political risings' and 'insurrectionary climaxes' to agitation. In the most recent over-all study of the Reform Bill M. R. Brock pondered the fact that the riots took place in boroughs whose corporations had a strong Whig or pro-Reform membership.⁴⁹

This article has shown that local concern with Reform first emerged at Mundy's nomination and in Strutt's election speech in 1830, and that pro-reform feeling created a popular coalition to support the Bill, as demonstrated at the county and borough meetings. The local crisis began when the Tories split into pro- and anti-Reform factions, failed to find a candidate to replace Mundy, and the Cavendishes offended the freeholders. It intensified when the reluctant Lords raised them to new heights of militancy, and reached a peak when the Lords rejected the Bill, sparking off the disorder which destroyed the coalition.

There is little evidence to confirm that the middle classes planned to unleash the people. It is true that Derby's middle classes took no steps to defend themselves during the riots, were reluctant to enroll as Specials, and perhaps sympathised with the prisoners; yet this indicates not a plot but a mixture of fear, a lack of leadership by (and confidence in) the Corporation, and a reaction against the Hussars. The riots began as a political demonstration and anti-Tory feeling motivated the attacks on property belonging to Bemrose, Mozley, Mundy and Wilmot; yet they were less risings or insurrections than spontaneous popular protests whose later stages were marked by non-political causes and objectives, showing some features of that well known contemporary phenomenon, the bread riot.

The pro-Reform Whigs on the Corporation contributed to the riots not by sympathising with the people or by indulging their political passions; but by managing the 1831 borough election so smoothly that they were denied a chance to show the depth of their feelings, so building up an emotional backlog which burst out in October; in contrast to most towns where the Reformers had a satisfying and victorious struggle at the polls, uniting the middle and the working classes under common leaders in a common cause.

In reality, the riots marked the unexpected and unwelcome eruption of urban violence into a struggle which was taking place within the traditional political system, largely dominated by the landed gentry and aristocracy. The reasons advanced in favour of Reform by Colville, Crewe and Evans were, indeed, very deeply traditional, indicating a desire to return to a purer political age rather than to progress to a new one. Gisborne not only took a brave and prominent part in trying to calm the rioters, but stood with the Duke of Devonshire in hoping that Reform would allay a demand for more drastic changes. The rioters confirmed their belief in the necessity of expedient concession.

In one very significant way the party attitudes to the Bill in Derby and Derbyshire were paradoxical, for the Cavendishes only reluctantly supported the Bill which their national leaders promoted; whereas many local Tories backed the Bill, hoping to free themselves from the Cavendishes, even though their national leaders opposed it. One nineteenth century commentator, Richard Cobden, leader of the Anti-Corn Law League, considered that pressure from the freeholders was decisive, giving the Whigs their majority in 1831; and the freeholders obviously had a major role in Derbyshire, although they hardly benefited from the Reform Act itself.⁵⁰

The riots had alarmed the Whig government, but (as we have seen) Grey resolved to press on with Reform, whilst Melbourne did his best to strengthen the forces of law and order, John Strutt clearly believed that tension was rising again in May 1832, and it is possible that memories of the events of October 1831 and fear of their recurrence, rather than the excited claims of pre-Reform Radicals such as Thomas Attwood in Birmingham or Francis Place in London, caused the Duke of Wellington to advise the King to give way.⁵¹

Ultimately, the government's concern for public security led to the Municipal Corporations Reform Act of 1835, which was intended to destroy the local oligarchies, creating a system of elected councils which deserved the citizens' confidence; and for the Borough Police Act of 1836, which was designed to allow the new local authorities to keep order without calling in the military, whose presence was both highly effective and deeply resented.

In the meantime, the result of the 1832 general election, and the period of stability which followed it, appeared to confirm Grey's own calculations; for public opinion had been satisfied and the balance of the existing system preserved. The county remained under a degree of aristocratic tutelage. In the borough, Col. Cavendish and Edward Strutt effectively stifled the Tories and the working classes, and the middle classes played but a subordinate part for, despite his speeches, Strutt regarded himself less as the voters' representative than as a largely independent member free to pursue his own interests, and soon began to enjoy the delights of London dinner-parties⁵¹

Althorp's patronage had marked Strutt as a 'coming man', and he became Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster in Lord Aberdeen's coalition government in 1852, and was given the baronetcy of Belper by Lord Palmerston in 1856, being perhaps the first nineteenth century industrialist to reach the House of Lords, but shortly afterwards retired from active political life. Few things show the strength and continuity of the traditional political system more obviously than the fact that the Cavendishes, in contrast, played a vital part in late century political affairs and have remained active in national politics almost until the present day.

REFERENCES

- 1 J. R. M. Butler, *The Passing of the Great Reform Bill* (1914); D. J. V. Jones, *Before Rebecca* (1973); Asa Briggs, 'Parliamentary Reform' *Cambridge Hist. Jnl.*, iii, 2 (1952), 239-317; D. Read, *The English Provinces* (1964), 82-91.
- 2 Norman Gash, *Sir Robert Peel* (1972); Elizabeth Longford, *Wellington* (1972); Philip Ziegler *Lord Melbourne* (1976).
- 3 John Cannon, *Parliamentary Reform, 1640-1832* (Cambridge, 1973).
- 4 George Rudé and Eric Hobsbaum, *Captain Swing* (1969).
- 5 *Derby Mercury*, 12 and 26 Jan., 2 Feb. 1831; Samuel Rowbottom, Diary, Derby Central Library (D.C.L.) f 8736, 24 Jan. 1831; Anon, A Derby Diary, D.C.L., f9366, 8 Jan., 8 and 10 Aug., 13 Mch., 22 Sept. 1831.
- 6 S. Glover, *Directory of the County of Derby* (1829), 35; S. Glover, *History and Directory of the Borough of Derby* (1843) 5; C. E. Hogarth, 'The Derbyshire Parliamentary Elections of 1832', *D.A.J.*, lxxxix (1969), 68-71.
- 7 *Derby Mercury*, 4 Aug. 1830.
- 8 C. E. Hogarth, *op. cit.*; *Dictionary of National Biography*.
- 9 *Derby Mercury* 4 Aug. 1830.
- 10 *Ibid.*
- 11 D.C.L., Strutt Letters, Edward Strutt to his wife, 3 and 19 Nov. 1830.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 19 Feb. and 2 Mch. 1831.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 16 Mch. 1831; C. E. Hogarth, *op. cit.*, 81; *Derby Mercury*, 2 Mch. 1831.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 9 and 23 Mch. 1831.
- 15 D.C.L. Strutt Letters, 23 April, 9 Mch. 1831.
- 16 *Derby Mercury*, 30 Mch. 1831.
- 17 C. E. Hogarth, *op. cit.*, 72.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 73.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 72.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 73; *Derby Mercury*, 11 and 18 May, 27 Jly. 1831.
- 21 *Derby Mercury*, 29 June, 17 Aug., 14, 21, 28 Sept. 1831.
- 22 *Ibid.*, 5 Oct. 1831.
- 23 *Ibid.*
- 24 *Ibid.*, 12 Oct. 1831. For easily accessible accounts, see W. A. Richardson, *Citizen's Derby* (1949), 170; A. W. Davidson, *Derby: Its Rise and Progress* (1970), 137-38.
- 25 *Ibid.*
- 26 *Ibid.*

- 27 *Derby Mercury*, 12 Oct. 1831; Samuel Rowbottom, Diary, 9 and 11 Oct. 1831; Anon., A Derby Diary, 9 Oct. 1831; Wyatt Papers, D.C.L., 9 Oct. 1831.
- 28 *Derby Mercury*, 12 and 19 Oct. 1831; Samuel Rowbottom, Diary, 9 Oct. 1831; Anon., A Derby Diary, 8 and 10 Oct. 1831.
- 29 S. Glover, *Directory*, passim.
- 30 *Derby Mercury* 19 Oct. 1831, 17 Mch. 1832; Thomas Richardson (printer), *Derby Riots* (1832), 5-14.
- 31 D.C.L., *Letters on Riots*, B.A. 328.42, Balguy to Major Buckley, to Lord Melbourne, 9, 10, 11, Oct. 1831.
- 32 Anon., A Derby Diary, 9 and 10 Oct. 1831.
- 33 C. Harrison (ed), 'Extracts from William Bamford's Diary', *Derbys. Miscellany*, iv, Pt. I (Mch. 1966), 48; *Derby Mercury*, 19 Oct. 1831; D.C.L., B.A. 328.42, Balguy to Lord Melbourne, 20 Oct. 1831.
- 34 Public Record Office (P.R.O.), Home Office, Disturbance Entry Books, HO. 41/10, Lord Melbourne to the Mayor, 1 Nov. 1831; D.C.L. B.A. 328.42, Balguy to Sir Charles Paget, 12, 18, 19, 23 Nov. 1831.
- 35 P.R.O., HO. Counties Correspondence, HO. 52/12, Wilmot to Lord Melbourne, 31 Nov. 1831; *ibid.*, Lord Vernon to Lord Melbourne, 21 Oct. 1831; *ibid.*, 41/10 Mundy Correspondence, 8 and 23 Nov. 1831; *ibid.*, 41/11 Mundy C., 2 and 3 Jan. 1832.
- 36 *Derby Mercury* 11 Jan. 1831.
- 37 *Ibid.*, 14 and 23 Mch. 1832; Thomas Richardson, *op. cit.*, 5, 23.
- 38 John Wigley, 'Nottingham and the Reform Bill Riots', *Transactions of the Thoroton Society of Notts* (1973), 95-103; Royal Archives, William IV — Lord Melbourne Correspondence, The King to Viscount Melbourne, 10 Oct. 1831. I am grateful for the gracious permission of Her Majesty the Queen to make use of this material. C. S. Parker, *Sir Robert Peel*, ii (1899), 189; *Hansard*, Third Series, viii, cols. 589-591 (12 Oct. 1831).
- 39 J. Cannon, *op. cit.*, passim.
- 40 P.R.O. HO., Counties C., HO. 52/12, Duke of Devonshire to Lord Melbourne, 8 and 23 Nov. 1831, Sir C. H. Colville to Lord Melbourne, 14 Oct. 1831; D.C.L., Strutt Letters, Edward Strutt to his wife, 20 Feb. 1832.
- 41 *Ibid.*, Edward Strutt to his wife, 14 and 15 Mch., 3, 12, and 14 April 1832; *Hansard*, Third Series, xii, cols. 788-791 (10 May 1832).
- 42 D.C.L., Strutt Letters, John to Edward Strutt, 13 May 1832; Sir Denis Le Marchant, *Memoir to Lord Althorp* (1876), 420.
- 43 *Derby Mercury*, 6, 13 and 20 June, 8 Aug. 1832.
- 44 C. E. Hogarth, *op. cit.*, passim.
- 45 *Derby Mercury*, 11 July, 19 and 31 Oct., 21 Nov., 19 Dec. 1832.
- 46 *Ibid.*, 26 Dec. 1832.
- 47 *Ibid.*, 19 and 26 Dec. 1832.
- 48 T. Ford (printer), *Figaro in Chesterfield* (1823); Barnaby Brush (pseud.), *The Duster* (1832), Nos. 2 and 3 (19 and 26 Oct. 1832), 10-11.
- 49 J. R. M. Butler, *op. cit.* (1964 ed.), 119-20; G. Rudé, 'English Rural and Urban Disturbances', *Past and Present*, xxxvi, (1967), 88-102; E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963), 72, 74; M. Brock, *The Great Reform Act* (1973), 151-53.
- 50 N. McCord, *The Anti-Corn Law League*, (1968), 152.
- 51 C. M. Wakefield, *The Life of Thomas Attwood* (1885), 173-83; Graham Wallas, *The Life of Francis Place* (1898), 315-23.
- 52 Strutt Letters, Edward Strutt to his wife, 27 Mch. 1833.