

THE POWER OF PRINT : GRAPHIC IMAGES OF PETERLOO

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Within a fortnight of the confused events in St Peter's Fields on 16 August 1819, "Peterloo" had crystallised into the powerful symbol of a struggle which transcended that between the loyalist authorities and the weavers of Lancashire. It was, in the words of the radical *Manchester Observer*, "a day of paramount importance to the liberties of our country, as 'Big with the fate of Freedom and of Albion' ".¹

How did Peterloo so rapidly take on this emblematic significance? In reading the eye-witness accounts of those who acted in the field or formed an audience at the vantage points of surrounding houses and streets, and in following the fierce polemics of the press, one has the impression of a carefully rehearsed epic drama. In part this must be due to the ease with which the well-known views of the individual actors — Tory magistrates, local yeomanry and constables and radical leaders — could be identified with those of the social classes they represented. One leading protagonist, the Reverend Hay, thought that "the meeting was looked upon, on both sides, as an experiment — a touchstone of the spirit of the Magistrates, and of the courage of the mob".² But this experiment had long been prepared in the political antagonisms of the national and local press, in the mass of radical "twopenny trash", placards and ballads, and their antidote in the 'Church and King' pamphlets written by the clerical magistrates themselves. Among the many symbolic aspects of Peterloo was the presence on Orator Hunt's rostrum of the *Times* journalist, John Tyas,

together with the London radical publisher, Richard Carlile; the sub-editor of the *Manchester Observer*, Saxton; Edward Baines of the *Leeds Mercury* and John Smith of the *Liverpool Mercury*. In the weeks to come, the press was not only witness but judge and jury in the indictment of those involved at Peterloo, providing instant historiography and legend.³

In this bitter propaganda war, cheap periodicals and pamphlets far exceeded in volume and importance the visual images of Peterloo. Graphic processes were relatively slow and costly and skilled print designers were few. Yet even a simple visual image could attain an immediacy and symbolic force denied to the printed word, and it is arguable that the engravings have ultimately had the greater influence in creating a mental picture of "the Peterloo massacre".

Their value to the radicals was in illustrating and stamping on the spectator's memory the many individual incidents narrated in the newspaper reports. "We are (not) yet familiarised to murders", wrote a correspondent of Shuttleworth, "and the better feelings of the people will strengthen as they become acquainted with the facts . . . every separate instance of barbarity should be laid and relaid before them".⁴ James Wroe, publisher of the *Manchester Observer*, announced the serial issue of *Peter Loo Massacre!!!* as early as 28 August 1819, and appealed for detailed information on casualties to be printed in its numbers. The map of St Peter's Fields he published in his paper on 23 October was "a record of the dire facts",

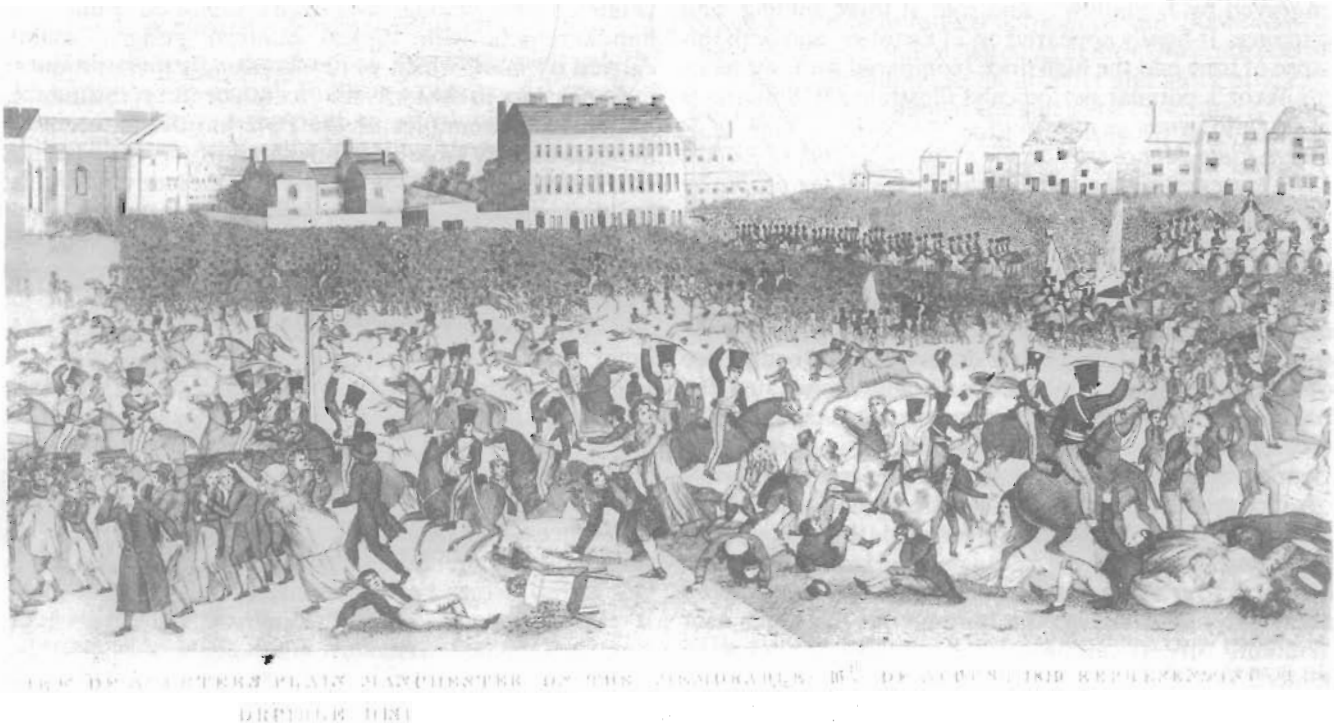


Plate 1. A View of St. Peter's Plain Manchester . . . Engraved by J. Sudlow from a drawing by T. Whaite; published Manchester, October 1819.

which readers were exhorted to preserve and display “in some conspicuous part of the house”, and to use like a catechism with their children. In a similar way, the prints of Peterloo authenticated the killings and woundings through an apparently faithful reconstruction of the movements of the yeomanry cavalry and the crowd within the familiar topography of the Fields; documentary “facts” were the most effective form of persuasion.

It is interesting that, along with the popular publications referred to above, some of these prints emanated from the *Observer* office in Market Street and Wroe’s shop in Ancoats Street. Following the practice of many eighteenth-century provincial printers, Wroe combined the functions of newspaper proprietor and publisher of many kinds of printed ephemera, with those of second-hand bookseller and publishers’ agent; he even dealt in sheet music and musical instruments.⁵ What differentiates Wroe from his earlier Georgian counterparts, is the violent partisanship which marked his ventures, and which made his window displays a part of the political battleground. On one occasion Lord Stanley complained in the House of Lords that Wroe exhibited ‘prints descriptive of the cavalry cutting at the people, and the names of individual yeomen also connected with those prints’. “To the dreadful charge of having exhibited prints of Peter’s Field, as it appeared on the bloody 16th of August, we must plead guilty” was the scornful riposte: “but we defy it to be truly said, that we ever descended to become aspersers of individual character”.⁶ While narrowly avoiding charges of personal libel, Wroe had clearly found effective methods of identifying particular aggressors with the figures in the prints, just as in the *Manchester Observer*’s publication of bills of indictment brought by the victims of Peterloo, the naming of the yeomen concerned, their neighbours from childhood, brought out the full horror of this fratricidal onslaught.

A month after Peterloo, Wroe advertised “Proposals for publishing by subscription a print of the dispersion of the meeting . . . commonly called the Peter Loo Massacre!!! From a drawing taken on the spot by T. Whaite, to be engraved by J. Sudlow”, and sold at three shillings and sixpence. It finally appeared on 21 October, and both this lapse of time and the high price (compared with twopence for Wroe’s popular periodicals) illustrate the limitations of intaglio prints as a form of propaganda. *A View of St Peter’s Plain Manchester on the memorable 16th of August 1819 representing the forcible dispersion of the people by the yeomanry cavalry* (Plate 1) was drawn by an inexperienced local artist who, according to Mrs Linnaeus Banks, was “upon the field” as an “adherent of the cause of Radical reform”, and attempted a comprehensive view of the site and the successive stages of the drama.⁷ The row of houses in Mount Street, from which the committee of magistrates overlooked the Fields, dominates the background. In the far distance on the left is the corner of Pickford’s waggon yard in Portland Street — perhaps less clearly visible in actuality, but necessary in the assembly of incriminating evidence, as the place where the concealed yeomanry cavalry awaited their summons. From this far side of the field, an orderly file of yeomen advances four abreast through the densely-packed crowd and surrounds Hunt on the hustings (to the right, near Windmill Street) raising their right arms as though in salute. Yet in the foreground the routing of the panic-stricken people is already well advanced: women and infants lie killed or wounded, a man prays vainly for mercy, and in the left background the crowd is funnelled with deadly effect into the corner of the open space near

the Quaker meeting house and St Peter’s church, where the infantry blocked their path. This apparently artless conflation of events does nothing to clarify the contentious point of when and how, exactly, the arrest of Hunt and the other radical leaders turned into a mêlée with indiscriminate sabring of the crowd; a point on which there were apparent contradictions in the press from the outset.⁸ The majority of Peterloo prints, in fact, show Hunt still present, and must have added fuel to the accusation of unprovoked violence from the moment of the yeomanry’s entry into the crowd.

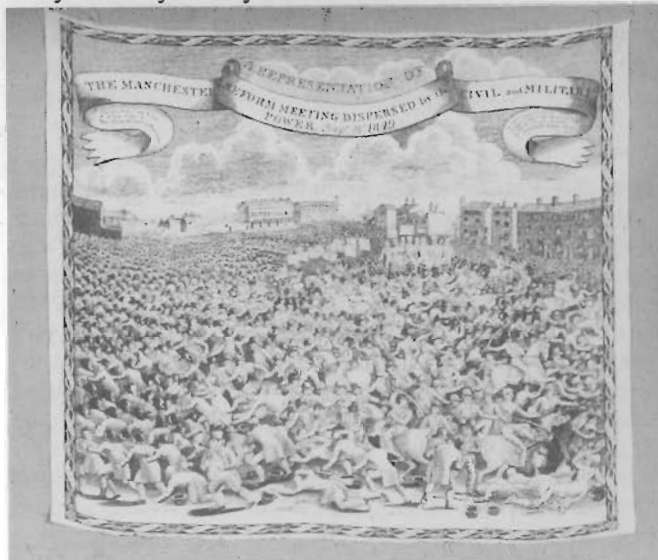


Plate 2. A Representation of the Manchester Reform Meeting . . . Calico handkerchief with engraved design by J. Slack.

Another Peterloo print, *A view of St Peter’s Place, and Manner in which the Manchester Reform Meeting was dispersed by Civil & Military Power*, was based on a “cabinet picture” by John Slack; although it seems to have been claimed and re-issued at a later date by Wroe or his son.⁹ In composition it is close to the similarly-titled design by Slack printed on a cheap calico handkerchief. (Plate 2) This belongs to a long-established tradition of handkerchiefs with topical political designs, mainly carried by men, which were increasingly mass-produced in Lancashire in the early nineteenth century: the number of surviving examples of the Peterloo design seems to indicate its very large sale and popularity.¹⁰ The assertion of objectivity implied by the numbered key to the buildings and a mass of descriptive detail is again combined with clear political intention in the repeated words of the radicals’ credo, *Universal Suffrage Annual Parliaments and Election by Ballot* running round the decorative border. The print gives a broader view of St Peter’s Fields than the related “cabinet picture”: the sweep of buildings, as in Whaite’s design, provides a dramatic stage, stretching from the Quaker meeting house, site of one of the bitterest clashes, to the poor-looking houses, workshops and Windmill public house behind the radicals’ platform. However, there are many differences in the architectural features, and the viewpoint is higher, allowing a bird’s eye panorama of the vast crowd, which here almost completely fills the space. It reflects the radicals’ high estimate of the numbers at the meeting (150,000, as against Hay’s claim of 30,000), but also evokes Lieutenant Jolliffe’s description from the hussars’ perspective, of the ground being “in all parts . . . so filled with people that their hats seemed to touch”.¹¹ The novel signs of the reform unions’ solidarity and sense of purpose are clearly emphasised, in the banners and

caps of liberty ranked near the podium, including that of the Manchester Female Union Society. However, the more threatening of the slogans which so alarmed the loyalists — the Royton Female Union's "Let us DIE like men and not be sold like slaves" . . . "a Black Flag, on which was inscribed 'Universal Suffrage or Death' " . . . "one had a bloody pike represented on it" . . . — are not to be seen, and near Hunt is the conspicuous instruction "Order". It should be remembered that, in the autumn of 1819, non-violent Huntite radicals, Wroe among them, were at pains to dissociate themselves from Thistlewood's "ultra-radicals"; "bad characters", who "looked like a d—d set of thieves" and hatched schemes for an armed uprising. They were a threat to the constitutional cause and to the flourishing business of radical publishers.¹² Thus the most striking feature of the scene is the well-dressed effect of the crowd, the men respectably hatted, some even with frilled shirts, the women wearing caps and patterned handkerchiefs. The repetition of the heads gives, even in retreat, an impression of the disciplined drills which the magistrates had watched in horrified fascination as the reformers arrived in St Peter's Fields. Prentice had noted the gaiety of the spectacle: "There were haggard-looking men, certainly, but the majority were young persons, in their best Sunday suits, and the light-coloured dresses of the cheerful, tidy-looking women relieved the effect of the dark fustians worn by the men". Moreover, as Bamford explained:

*"We had frequently been taunted by the press, with our ragged, dirty appearance, at these assemblages; with the confusion of our proceedings, and the mob-like crowds in which our numbers were mustered; and we determined that, for once at least, these reflections should not be deserved, — that we would disarm the bitterness of our political opponents by a display of cleanliness, sobriety and decorum, such as we never before had exhibited. In short, we would deserve their respect by shewing that we respected ourselves, and knew how to exercise our rights of meeting, as it were well Englishmen always should do, — in a spirit of sober thoughtfulness . . ."*¹³

How much more damning is the indictment of the yeomanry in the sequel. In Slack's picture, the speakers stand unresisting on the podium, surrounded by a sea of upraised sabres, while all about them the working people who had come to assert their political maturity and fitness



Plate 3. Dreadful Scene at Manchester Meeting . . . Anonymous engraving published by J. Evans, London, 27 August 1819.

for parliamentary representation are terrorised by the anarchists on horseback. Only one reformer raises a stick in self-defence, while the stout man in the left foreground perhaps represents a middle-class sympathiser. Women stumble in the panicked rush, and in the foreground the "mounds of human beings" described by Bamford begin to form, particularly to the right, where the crowd converges on the escape route down Watson Street. For all its naivety, the drawing vividly evokes the impression of local householders:

*" . . . Like the 'Dance of Death' . . . ludicrously horrid. The living heaps 'adventuring resurrection'; the grotesque attitudes of some of the fallen; the quantity of shoes, hats, bonnets, sticks and batons . . . garmished here and there with a silk banner and a cap of liberty presented a scene of disorder and dismay, which, when contrasted with the previous bright array and triumphant shouts of reform, must have excited laughter, had it not been connected so closely with human suffering and violence . . ."*¹⁴

It has been shown that these prints produced in Manchester drew on local knowledge and particularities in the effort to make real the outrage of the yeomanry's unprovoked attack; but Peterloo was never purely a local issue. From the date of publication of Tyas's famous eyewitness account in *The Times* (19 August) the nation at large was caught up in the furious arguments in the press over the apportionment of blame. London print-publishers cashed in on the public excitement as quickly as the pamphleteers. It is likely that several of these prints would have found their way into Wroe's shop-window in Manchester, along with placards advertising consignments of radical papers like *Black Dwarf* and *Sherwin's Register* which he regularly received from London: distribution networks were well established, and Lord Eldon believed, "there was . . . scarcely a village in the Kingdom that had not its little shop, in which nothing was sold but blasphemy and sedition". There is evidence that political prints as well as pamphlets were increasingly offered for sale in radical bookshops and "hawked in all the streets" of London, whereas in the eighteenth century they had sold mainly to the smaller and more privileged public which frequented the specialist caricature shops of the City and the West End.¹⁵ Prints of Peterloo even reached remote country areas through the efforts of travelling showmen, one of whom was arrested and brought before the local clerical magistrate at Chudleigh, near Exeter, for exhibiting:

"a Show-box containing among other prints or pictures which by the aid of a magnifying glass made the persons described on them, to appear as large as life, one, which purported to be a Meeting of the Radical reformers, which lately took place at Manchester . . . the person . . . in his description of it to the populace, made use of seditious expressions . . . I committed him to the house of correction at Exeter, as a Vagrant, till the Sessions . . . he observed that many others to his knowledge, had pictures of the same kinds in their show-boxes."

The print in question, which the showman had bought at a stationer's in Weymouth, was the crudely drawn and printed *Dreadful scene at Manchester* . . . (Plate 3) published as early as 27 August by a London hack bookseller, who is also found profiteering on the other side, as the authorised retailer of a penny sheet attacking Tom Paine on behalf of the Religious Tract Society. This

garbled image of Peterloo was roughly coloured in blue, red and yellow for the show-box, and the descriptive caption furnished the showman's patter, which seemed as dangerously inflammatory as the print ("the cavalry . . . he said destroyed more than an hundred people" . . .).¹⁶ As graphic designs moved into the field of radical invective, they lost some of the immunity from control which they had enjoyed in the eighteenth century, although prosecutions were still rare, in comparison with the repression of the written word.¹⁷

For a time, a mood of indignation and revulsion against the action of the Manchester magistrates united a large sector of opinion, and created a receptive market for the Peterloo prints: but this public actually represented a wide range of political views, from convinced republicans and advocates of armed revenge to liberals whose concerns were humanitarian and constitutional. The latter must have formed the majority of respectable buyers, and it was therefore important that the print designers should devise images of moral outrage purged of any symptoms of radical criminality. This was no easy task. The Georgian tradition of the singly-published satirical etching was in decline, with a trend towards cheaper and coarser material, for the expanding market of tradesmen and artisans. Its imagery remained trapped, however, within the limited gamut of situations and stereotypes inherited from the Gillray era. Political satire traded in irony, cynicism and vulgarity, and in this hackneyed vein the satirists dwelt with obvious relish on both the debaucheries of the Prince Regent at Brighton, and the supposed rabble-rousing efforts of plebeian demagogues. Pathos and righteous indignation were foreign to the idiom, and no pattern readily suggested itself for a scene of civilian massacre. When eighteenth-century satirists had shown the military marching or riding roughshod over people in the streets, the intention was usually grotesque slapstick, with fat women upended and exposed.¹⁸ The significant difference of approach in 1819 was due not simply to the seriousness of the incident, but to the changed climate of public opinion: forty years earlier the Gordon riots, in which 285 disaffected artisans and labourers were killed by the army, 173 wounded and another 25 hanged, evoked neither social compunction nor popular sympathy, but a marked hostility in the few prints which depicted them.¹⁹ In characterising the victims of Peterloo, therefore, the artists returned to an older tradition than the Georgian satire: in the atrocity imagery of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, — woodcuts showing Turkish barbarities against conquered Christians, or the engravings by Dutch propagandists of the persecution of Huguenots — may be found general prototypes for the raised supplicating hands and gestures of despair, the tragic mothers and infants and the brutal riders of the Peterloo prints.²⁰ As will be shown, however, the Peterloo artists found above all in contemporary history painting the most powerful and appropriate images through which to reveal the essential meaning of the Manchester tragedy.

Three rather similar designs were produced, perhaps in competition, by three of the leading London shops. They have none of the scenic descriptiveness of the Manchester prints, and yet perhaps convey a greater sense of the fundamental issues. *The Massacre of Peterloo! or a Specimen of English Liberty*, a hand-coloured aquatint etched and published by Marks, (Plate 4) is dated to the 16 August in both title and imprint; this is impossible as the date of actual publication and must be intended as commemoration, or as a commercial ploy to suggest



The Massacre of Peterloo! or a Specimen of English Liberty, August 16 1819

Plate 4. *The Massacre of Peterloo . . . Hand-coloured aquatint, etched and published by J. L. Marks, London.*

extreme topicality.²¹ Marks was, in fact, surprisingly well-informed about the details of the reports issuing from Manchester. Among his hideously caricatured yeomanry cavalry, the central figure is a pig-faced trumpeter who exults:

“. . . How Glorious our Ardour to lay down the Lives
Of defenceless Children, Husbands and Wives.
Meagre!!!”

This is a reference to the pugnacious Irishman, Edward Meagher, who led out the corps on the 16 August and was an object of particular loathing to the readers of the *Manchester Observer*. The yeoman on the left who butchers an old man complains “D—n the fellow he has not made my Sword half sharp enough”, an allusion to the sharpening of the yeomanry's sabres in preparation for the meeting in St Peter's Fields, which the reformers and their sympathisers publicised to prove that the violence was premeditated. Equally controversial was the question as to whether the Riot Act had been read audibly, read in time, or indeed read at all: here a bestial rum-drinking magistrate in the window jokes “Cut away lads! the Riot Act is being read up in the Corner!”; that is, by a fellow magistrate in the room with his back turned. Nadin, the notorious deputy constable, grimaces horribly, a pantomime villain. “What a Glorious Day, this is our Waterloo!” In this travesty of a heroic classical battle relief, space is compressed so that the main actors in the drama are juxtaposed, filling the sheet with strident imagery.

Massacre at St Peters or “BRITONS STRIKE HOME!!!”, (Page 11) also carrying the fictitious publication date of 16 August, was produced by Tegg of Cheapside, who normally specialised in cheap re-issues and popular bawdy, and had shown no previous sympathy with the reformers. It is hastily drawn, probably by one of the Cruikshanks.²² The drunken yeomanry cavalry are in obvious disarray, their horses out of control, as many witnesses described them. These bloated tradesmen (“. . . they want to take our Beef & Pudding from us! — & remember the more you Kill the less poor rates you'll have to pay . . .”) have all become symbolic butchers, with over-sleeves, steels and blood-stained axes, one tellingly superimposed on the Union Jack. But the most powerful accusation lies in the play on the words of a patriotic song in the title: the military ruthlessness of Waterloo is aped by these amateur soldiers in a cowardly attack on the weakest of their unarmed fellow-citizens. Volunteer militias were a traditional butt of humour, and had often featured in satirical prints.²³ However, the scorn of the radicals for the recently-raised Manchester

yeomanry cavalry, which had been given vent in the press before and after Peterloo, was reinforced by the class hatred which pulled apart and threatened to destroy the social fabric of industrial Lancashire.²⁴ The traditional fear of standing armies as an instrument of civil repression was now compounded by the deep unpopularity of the Napoleonic wars, perceived by the radicals as a crushing of French liberties by the forces of reaction; and the *Manchester Observer's* coinage of "Peterloo" to describe the 16 August expressed this . . . "Does the delirium produced by the unexpected result of the battle of Waterloo still possess their faculties? . . . is the fruit of that day's fight to exterminate England's Freedom, as it has already done that of the Continent?"²⁵ It was, indeed, the alarming precedent set by the involvement of the military at Manchester, to enforce actions of doubtful legality by the civil authorities, which most disturbed middle-class liberals, however they might impugn the motives of the radical leaders in convening the meeting. In the words of the *Times* leader on 19 August:

. . . all such considerations, all such suspicions, sink to nothing before the dreadful fact, that nearly a hundred of the King's unarmed subjects have been sabred by a body of cavalry in the streets of a town of which most of them were inhabitants, and in the presence of those Magistrates whose sworn duty it is to protect and preserve the life of the meanest Englishman".



Plate 5. The Decisive Charge of the Life Guards at the Battle of Waterloo. Engraved by W. Bromley from L. Clennell's painting.

Ignoring the complexities of social and political divisions in Lancashire, the prints of Peterloo present a horrifying synoptic image of what Carlile, in the first number of the *Republican*, called "the war between the oppressor and the oppressed": and the prototype for that image was found in the many recent pictures of the battle of Waterloo itself, particularly in Luke Clennell's *The Decisive Charge of the Life Guards at the Battle of Waterloo — "Sauve qui peut"* (Plate 5) in which serried ranks of cavalymen mow down the revolutionary forces in their relentless onslaught.²⁶ It was probably Cruikshank who seized on this model in a seminal drawing (Plate 6), now in Manchester City Art Gallery, which contains many echoes of Clennell and other Waterloo renderings, and in its turn relates to several of the Peterloo prints.²⁷ The militaristic ideals of the battle scenes are thus strikingly subverted. It was noted at the time that Clennell had based his composition on Benjamin West's famous *Death on the pale horse*, and Cruikshank also seems to have seized on the aptness of this 'high art' reference in depicting Death and Hell triumphant at Peterloo, with power "to kill with sword and with hunger" . . . Cruikshank's Peterloo victims have



Plate 6. The Manchester Yeomanry Cavalry . . . Drawing by George Cruikshank.

a striking affinity to West's monumental group.²⁸ However, in his *Manchester Heroes* (Plate 7), published by Fores,²⁹ the effect is closer to the inexorable riders of Dürer's famous woodcut *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (Plate 8): this stood at the beginning of the iconographic tradition of which West's design provided the culmination, and even the "pair of balances" of the third rider seems to be echoed in the scales issuing from the head of the Prince Regent, in which "Peculators" outweigh "Reformers". It seems probable that Shelley had such visual allusions in mind when he described Anarchy masquerading as "God, and King, and Law" at Peterloo:

" . . . On a white horse, splashed with blood;
He was pale even to the lips
Like Death in the Apocalypse"³⁰

The victims in the London prints are ragged and poverty-stricken, unlike the Manchester artists' portrayal, and women with their children predominate. Women were actually a small minority among the reformers at Peterloo, but their fate had received much attention in the press, not only because of the disproportionate number who suffered injuries, but because of the novelty of their engagement in organised political action. Their presence had been advanced as proof of the peaceful intentions of the crowd. "Oh pray Sir, doan't Kill Mammy, she only came to see Mr Hunt"; innocent passivity was more acceptable to the general public and more emotive than frustrated militancy. The noble-featured but unresisting women of *Massacre at St Peters or BRITONS STRIKE*

Plate 7. Manchester Heroes. Hand-coloured etching, probably by I.R. or George Cruikshank. Published by S.W. Fores, London, September 1819.

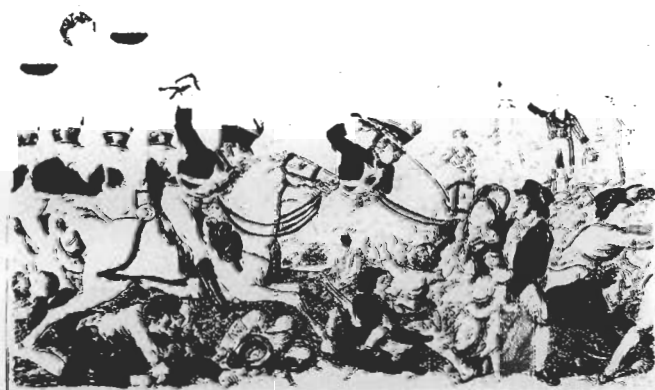




Plate 8. The Four Horsemen of Apocalypse. Woodcut by A. Dürer, 1498.

HOME!!!, are borrowed from the idiom of grand history painting, and have little in common with the satiric tradition — which still lingers, however, in the grotesquely distorted faces of the men at the margins of the design. The impact of Peterloo on public opinion may be judged by the volte-face which this image of the female reformers represents, in comparison with Cruikshank's portrayal of them for Humphrey's, Gillray's old publishers, only a few days before 16 August. In *The Belle-alliance or the Female Reformers of Blackburn!!!* (Plate 9)³¹ they are blowzy sluts or viragos in breeches in the tradition of Gillray's Jacobins; closely comparable, indeed, with the ghastly gin-swilling "Genius of Liberty and Equality" to whom Fox and Sheridan brought offerings in a print of 1794 by George Cruikshank's father, or her counterpart in his own *The Radical's Arms* (Page 41) of November 1819.³² In this return to the unregenerate scurrility of the eighteenth century, the involvement of women in politics is discredited by sexual innuendo, for example in the way the central woman grips the drooping cap of liberty on the chairman's "pole". The



Plate 9. The Belle-alliance, or the Female Reformers of Blackburn!!! Hand-coloured etching by G. Cruikshank, published by G. Humphrey, London, 12 August 1819.

double-entendres and phallic puns are even more blatant in *Much wanted a REFORM AMONG FEMALESS!!!* (Plate 10)³³ published by Marks only shortly before his *The Massacre of Peterloo!* . . . These burlesques totally belie the desperate seriousness of the meetings of the women's sections of the reformers' unions, (widely reported in the press in the month before Peterloo), from which men might actually be excluded, in order that the members should not be inhibited in their new office of "political orators".³⁴ Public opinion, however, could not come to terms with the shock of this phenomenon. If the reformers' attempt to wrest political power for working men was an assault on the status quo, the active intervention of working women in support of that campaign was an even more repugnant perversion of the natural order. It was widely believed that employment of women in the mills led to immorality, neglect of children and rejection of domestic responsibilities; these failings appeared in a more dangerous light when women conceived their maternal duty as being "to instil into the minds of our children, a deep and rooted hatred to our corrupt and tyrannical Rulers".³⁵ Even Tyas registered hostility to the marching women at Peterloo,³⁶ and "Proprietas" in the Tory *Exchange Herald* of Manchester on 17 August 1819 reminded them that it had always "been esteemed more virtuous and consistent for a woman to attend to her household affairs, and the moral and religious education of her offspring, than to be a Gossip". The worst government could not be improved

". . . by the 'Weaker Vessel', who cannot direct her own course by the common compass which Nature has prescribed her . . . You, perhaps, deceive yourselves, with the hope of acquiring celebrity — but it will be the celebrity of the Fish-woman of Paris, horrid and abhorred! . . ."

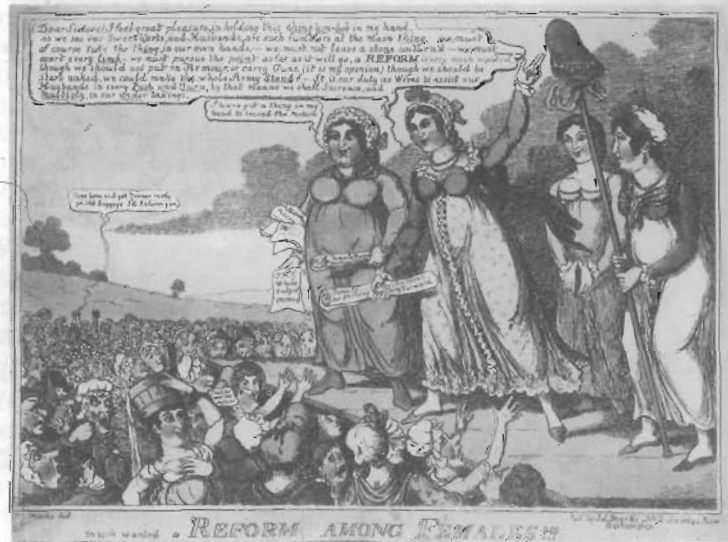


Plate 10. Much wanted, a Reform among FemaleSS!!! Hand-coloured etching executed and published by J.L. Marks, London.

The more sympathetic view of the reformers themselves found expression in only one print, which Richard Carlile commissioned and published from his "Temple of Reason" in Fleet Street, while on bail on various charges of publishing blasphemous and seditious libels, including inflammatory comments on Peterloo. Carlile had feminist sympathies and the print is inscribed to *Henry Hunt* . . . and to the *Female Reformers of Manchester and the adjacent Towns who were exposed to and suffered from the Wanton and Furious Attack made on them by that Brutal Armed Force the Manchester and Cheshire Yeomanry* . . .



Plate 11. To Henry Hunt Esq . . . and to the Female Reformers of Manchester (detail). Hand-coloured aquatint possibly by G. Cruikshank. Published by R. Carlile, London, 1 October 1819.

dedicated by their Fellow Labourer Richard Carlile. (Plate 11)³⁷ Here again, several of the figures of riders and victims apparently derive from Cruikshank's drawing — an example of how such scenes drew on common pictorial conventions. However, Carlile's personal memories of details like the slogans and the reformers' laurel sprigs confer the eye-witness quality so much admired by Mrs Linnaeus Banks. This verisimilitude lends conviction to the idealising characterisation of the reformers on the platform, among whom a woman clad in white is

conspicuous — holding a banner and posed in the “heroic diagonal” of ancient tradition. This was Mary Fildes, whom Carlile described in detail in his public letter of protest to Sidmouth: “Joan of Arc could not have been more interesting”. Below her is an alternative image of martyrdom, in the woman who holds up her infant in vain protest beneath the raised sabres of the cavalry; while on the left one of the clerical magistrates, Carlile's anathema, directs the carnage from the window of the house, like Herod in old paintings of the Massacre of the Innocents, his arm extended in command over the stabbing of a woman in the carriage.³⁸ Even here, in a print published by an advocate of armed rebellion, there was no place for Bamford's “heroine, a young married woman of our party, with her face all bloody, her hair streaming about her . . . her apron weighted with stones” who fought back near the Quakers' Meeting House, and was thought to have unhorsed her assailant with a brick bat; much less for the extremist who was reported to the Home Office, allegedly a representative of the Manchester female radical union who raised subscriptions for arms in London with a loaded pistol tied up in her handkerchief.³⁹

In the months which followed, the powerful symbol of Peterloo often recurs in the prints. Cruikshank's *A Strong proof of the Flourishing state of the Country, exemplied (sic) in the proposed Emigration to the Cape of Forlorn (crossed out) Good Hope . . .* (Plate 12)⁴⁰ is a bitter indictment of a government under which people are “driven from their Native Country by Starvation & the point of the Bayonet”. Castlereagh, egged on by the Prince Regent, cynically promises a land where “the Rocks are all Roast Beef” and bread and milk grow on trees; but the fantasy picture of the settlers in this paradise of plenty is contrasted with the brutal reality of “The Manchester Slaughter-men”, a “matchless picture” supposedly destined for Carlton House, in allusion to the



Plate 12. A Strong Proof of the Flourishing State of the Country . . . Hand-coloured etching by G. Cruikshank. Published by T. Tegg, London, 7 September 1819.

Prince's ambition to acquire borrowed lustre through a collection of heroic battle paintings of the French wars.

Several prints are attacks on the Peterloo clerical magistrates, Ethelston and Hay, whose diehard Toryism and judicial ferocity were used to typify their whole hated class, injecting the eighteenth-century stereotypes of the gouty, drink-blotched pluralist with a new political venom. In Cruikshank's *Preachee and Floggy too . . .* (Plate 13)⁴¹ the same clergyman delivers a sermon on Christian charity to the well-heeled, and draconian punishment to paupers and reformers: "go order the soldiers out to disperse them with the point of the *sword* (there's *no occasion* to read the *Riot Act*)" . . . a reference to Ethelston's much-disputed rôle in reading the Riot Act at Peterloo. "Cannon law" also figures in a scene of *Poor John Bull* . . . shackled and gagged by the notorious Six Acts passed at the end of the year, in which Castlereagh gleefully rips up "Twopenny Trash" and "Manchester steel", a dagger dripping with blood, impales Magna Carta.⁴²



Plate 13. *Preachee & Floggy too! . . . Hand-coloured etching by G. Cruikshank. Published by T. Tegg, London, 8 December 1819.*

Prints such as these correspond to the perception of the reformers in 1819, that the sufferings of the labouring class were attributable to the political system itself, with its inherent privilege and corruption, rather than to adventitious factors of trade and shortage or even to exploitation by the manufacturers. But how could this important message be conveyed in striking visual terms to the buyers of "twopenny trash" and the uninstructed working people themselves? Hand-coloured etchings of the kind discussed above only printed a few hundred copies, and sold at prices far beyond the pocket of mill hands and weavers. It was William Hone, a London radical publisher and bookseller comparable with Wroe in Manchester, who, in the aftermath of Peterloo, realised the need for a new, more popular medium. This took the form of little shilling pamphlets illustrated with wood-engravings by George Cruikshank, which had an immense success and circulated more widely than newspapers. Their high technical and artistic quality are in striking contrast to the rough cliché woodcuts and shoddy printing of the sheets issued by Catnach and Pitts in Seven Dials, and this very quality must have alarmed the authorities as a symptom — akin to Peterloo itself — of the organised ascendancy of the radical cause. The first, *The political house that Jack built* (Plate 15), went through more than fifty editions, and is said to have sold 100,000 copies.⁴³ It prompted a spate of such publications, many of them feeble loyalist ripostes. (Plate

14)⁴⁴ The format, inspired by Hone's enthusiasm for early books with integral woodcut pictures, reunited graphic satire with the printed word, and in this way rendered it more, not less intelligible to unsophisticated readers. His simple moral dualism, also probably indebted to earlier traditions of religious and political polemic, is equally distinct from the witty ambivalence of the Gillray mode. However Cruikshank's poignant illustrations were always the main attraction, and ridicule, a security against prosecution, predominated over didacticism. Thackeray remembered the "grinning mechanics" round the window of Hone's shop "who spelt the songs, and spoke them out for the benefit of the company", as they must have done in public houses and reformers' unions throughout the country.⁴⁵ Hone was not the first radical to adapt a nursery rhyme to the purposes of satire. It should be remembered, however, that in defending himself against a charge of blasphemy, in 1817, he had successfully argued that the target of parody was distinct from its vehicle, in that case the liturgy: there was thus a particularly sharp edge of triumphant mockery in his use of an inoffensive child's verse for this deadly political invective. The cumulative and repetitive pattern of Hone's *Political House* parody was perfectly adapted to reading aloud and memorisation, and effectively communicated the chain of cause and effect which linked the "Dandy of sixty" and his tyrannical ministers to the victims of Peterloo: for, notwithstanding the personal caricatures inherited from the eighteenth century, Hone



"Wretches,
Sprung from the lowest dregs and dirt of murderers,
Blasphemers, and whores."

THESE ARE

THE PEOPLE,

all tatter'd and torn,

Because they won't work,

for which they were born,

But would live on plunder,

from night to morn,

Who, in vain, endeavouring,

in every form,

To stir up a riot,

and raise a storm,

Plate 14. *The True Political House that Jack Built. Anonymous, published in London, January 1820.*



“Portentous, unexampled, unexplain’d!
 ——— What man seeing this,
 And having human feelings, does not blush,
 And hang his head, to think himself a man?
 ——— I cannot rest
 A silent witness of the headlong rage,
 Or heedless folly, by which thousands die——
 Bleed gold for Ministers to sport away.”

THESE ARE
THE PEOPLE

all tatter’d and torn,
 Who curse the day
 wherein they were born,
 On account of Taxation
 too great to be borne,
 And pray for relief,
 from night to morn;
 Who, in vain, Petition
 in every form,

Plate 15. The Political House that Jack Built. Written and published by W. Hone, wood-engravings by G. Cruikshank, London, December 1819.

had the new and more dangerous objective of indicting a political system, not simply its office holders:

“These are THE PEOPLE
 all tatter’d and torn,
 Who curse the day
 wherein they were born . . .
 . . . Who, peaceably Meeting
 to ask for Reform
 Were sabred by Yeomanry Cavalry . . .

The message was reinforced in 1821 in *A Slap at Slop*, Hone’s burlesque of the reactionary *New Times*, in newspaper format.⁴⁶ This features Cruikshank’s imaginary monument to the “Victory of Peterloo” in which a cavalryman on a rearing horse tramples a prostrate woman, and the plinth is decorated with an irradiated crown surrounded by skulls. Below it, a “Peterloo medal”, to be cast from the metal of Meagher’s trumpet, carries the stark emblem of a yeoman with a bloody axe poised over a kneeling supplicant. Cruikshank “whose able pencil has had greater scope here than in a pamphlet” surpassed himself in the dramatic economy of his designs, despite the evidence of his growing disillusionment with the rôle of radical propagandist.

Hone was later to claim that “By showing what engraving on wood could effect in a popular way, and exciting a taste for art in the more humble ranks of life” his pamphlets “created a new era in the history of publication”. The political excitement caused by Peterloo was a major stimulus in this development, which hastened the demise of the Georgian satirical etching. It is ironic that the mass of entertaining cheap commodity literature to which the pamphlets gave birth had little in common with the committed, if opportunistic, radicalism of Hone, Carlile and Wroe in the years round 1819, when the power of a free press was venerated as a “Palladium of Liberty” for the unrepresented, “destined to work the great necessary moral and political changes among mankind”.

NOTES

- For various kinds of help in researching this article, I am most grateful to the following people: Colin Buckley, Michael Powell and Julian Treuherz.
1. *Manchester Observer*, 23 Oct. 1819.
 2. *Address to the inhabitants of York* extracted from the *Yorkshire Gazette* of 18 Sept. 1819; among Hay’s pamphlets in the scrapbook in Chetham’s Library, Manchester.
 3. D. Read, *Peterloo, the ‘massacre’ and its background* (Manchester, 1958), p.132. L. James *Print and the people 1819-1851* (London, 1976), pp.62, 68.
 4. Letter from G. Young of Shrewsbury, 27 Sept. 1819; he wanted information about Peterloo to be disseminated “not only thro’ the papers, but by hawking it thro’ every town, village and hamlet in the kingdom”. Shuttleworth scrapbook, Local History Library, Manchester.
 5. *Manchester Observer* advertisement, 6 Feb. 1819.
 6. *Ibid.*, 4 Dec. 1819. R. Walmsley, *Peterloo: the case reopened* (Manchester, 1969), p.342.
 7. The proposal to publish the print first appeared in the *Manchester Observer* on 18 Sept. Thomas Whaite (c.1796-1881) its designer and publisher, later exhibited portraits, sporting scenes and sculptures at the Royal Manchester Institution. Mrs Linnaeus Banks (*The Manchester Man*, 1896 edition, p.477) knew of an oil painting of Peterloo by this artist, which had been in the collection of his nephew, Frederick Whaite, but was since lost. John Sudlow, listed in the *Manchester Directory* in 1821 and 1824-5, engraved views and book illustrations. Information on both is in the Arnold Hyde archive on local artists in Manchester City Art Gallery.
 8. *The Times*, 19 Aug., editorial and Tyas’s report. *Manchester Observer*, 21 Aug., main report and ‘Important Communication to the People of England’.
 9. Two states of the print are in Manchester City Art Gallery: the one that appears to be the earlier is inscribed *A Cabinet Picture Drawn & Etched by J. Slack Manchester*. At some stage Wroe was substituted for Slack, and the print is generally described as by Wroe. There is no other evidence that James Wroe, editor of the *Manchester Observer* in 1819, was an artist or engraver. However another James Wroe — his son? — listed in the *Manchester Directory* of 1853 as a bookseller and stationer, designed at least one print. (Arnold Hyde Archive, see note 7) Mrs Banks (op.cit. p.477) thought the “crude” engraving of Peterloo with Wroe’s signature, “disseminated so freely during the ‘Old Manchester’ Exhibition, is simply a reduction in black and white of the highly-coloured scene upon the banner [lost, but attributed by her to Henry Whaite, Thomas’s brother]; and is not truly representative”. It is reproduced in the *Peterloo . . . portfolio of contemporary documents* (Manchester, 1975), No.8.
 10. There are examples in the Frow’s Working-Class Movement Library and the British Museum Department of Prints and Drawings. Platt Hall Gallery of English Costume has three, of which one is in pristine condition, printed in purplish brown, still raw-edged at top and bottom and with the original glaze. Others are printed in red. M. Braun-Ronsdorf, *The history of the handkerchief* (Leigh-on-Sea, 1967), pp.31-4 and Fig.72; M. Schoeser, *Printed handkerchiefs*, booklet linked to the Museum of London’s exhibition *This Gorgeous Mouchoir* (London, 1988), p.12 and compare pl.25. M.D. George in *British Museum Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires* (London, 1870-1954) (hereafter *BM Cat*) No. 13262 is for once incorrect in stating that the design is a wood-engraving; it was printed from a copper plate. The Arnold Hyde archive indicates that John Slack (died c.1828) was principally a topographical engraver and book illustrator, but his presumed heirs were engravers working for calico printers. I have not been able to trace the tradition recorded by the Frows, that the handkerchief was sold to raise money for Peterloo victims and dependants.

11. Quoted F.A. Bruton, "The story of Peterloo" in *Bulletin of John Rylands Library*, 5 (1919), p.288.
12. Read, op.cit., pp.222-3; J. Belchem, *'Orator' Hunt: Henry Hunt and English working-class radicalism* (Oxford, 1985), pp.121-3.
13. Bruton op.cit., p.271; S. Bamford *Passages in the life of a radical* (London, new edn. 1967), Vol.II p.177 and compare pp.198-200.
14. *The Observer* (London), 20 August 1819, letter from correspondent; in Hay Scrapbook, Chetham's Library.
15. W.H. Wickwar, *The struggle for the freedom of the press 1819-1832* (London, 1928), pp.135, 181; *B M Cat*, Introduction to Vol.X, 1820-1827, p.xi and n.2; I. McCalman *Radical underworld: prophets, revolutionaries and pornographers in London 1795-1840* (Cambridge, 1988), p.171. The Queen's affair in 1820 probably increased and drew attention to this trend.
16. Public Record Office: H.O. 42/199; letter to Sidmouth, 25 Nov. 1819, from Rev Gilbert Burrington, a Prebendary of Exeter and instigator of a Declaration signed by the Chudleigh loyalists, who resolved to suppress "blasphemous and seditious publications". A witness's deposition was provided by Burrington's spy, the local cheesemonger. The print, together with other material sent to the Home Office (including the hostile *Extracts from the life of Thomas Paine*), is still on file. Wickwar op.cit., p.112, and Appendix A.
17. *B M Cat*. Introduction to Vol.IX, 1811-1819, pp.xiv, xix.
18. eg. Gillray's *A march to the Bank 1787* and Isaac Cruikshank's *The last Grand Ministerial expedition on the Str——t Piccadilly 1810* (*B M Cat* Nos. 7174, 11543).
19. G. Rudé *The crowd in history 1730-1848* (London, 1981), pp.59-62. The rioters were selective in attacks on property (mainly that of the privileged classes, not simply Catholics or their sympathisers) and caused no fatalities. H.M. Atherton, "The 'Mob' in eighteenth-century caricature", *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 1978 (12) pp.50-1.
20. D. Kunzle *The early comic strip* (Los Angeles and London, 1973), especially pp.96-115.
21. *B M Cat*, No. 13260. For the pro-radical Marks, cf. McCalman op.cit., pp.166, 205-6.
22. *B M Cat*, No. 13258. G.W. Reid *A descriptive catalogue of the works of George Cruikshank* (London, 1871), Vol.1 No. 906; M.D. George *English political caricature, Vol.II 1793-1832* (Oxford, 1959), p.181; J. Wardroper *The caricatures of George Cruikshank* (London, 1977), p.79; H.T. Dickinson in *Caricatures and the constitution 1760-1832* (Cambridge, 1986), p.256 takes the date at face value.
23. Cf. eg. Gillray's *St George's Volunteers charging down Bond Street . . . & Storming the Dunghill at Marybone 1797* illus. in D. Hill *Fashionable contrasts: caricatures by James Gillray* (London, 1966), pl.20.
24. eg. *Manchester Observer* 17 July, 21 Aug. 1819. *Black Dwarf* 30 June 1819 called "the yeomanry institutions . . . a stratagem of the Pitt system, to array one portion of society against another, and to destroy by dividing the people".
25. *Manchester Observer* 20 Feb. 1819. *Sherwin's Weekly Political Register* 16 Aug. 1817 typified the radical position in describing the "poor ill-treated soldier" as a mere instrument of "the authors of tyranny", and this attitude may partly explain the more lenient view of the rôle of the regulars at Peterloo.
26. Exhibited at the British Institution 1816. J. Hichberger, *Images of the army: the military in British art, 1815-1914* (Manchester, 1988), pp.23-5. I am grateful to Joany Hichberger for discussion of Waterloo paintings. C de W Crookshank *Prints of British military operations, a catalogue raisonné* (London, 1921), lists some 69 contemporary representations of the Waterloo campaign. Denis Dighton's *Battle of Waterloo* etched by W.T. Fry, and Alexander Sauerweid's two scenes of the battle engraved by J. and H.R. Cook (published 1819), are especially interesting in relation to the Peterloo prints.
27. With later inscription. Manchester City Art Gallery also has an unpublished aquatint reproducing the drawing, inscribed in manuscript *Engraved by Somebody from a Drawing made by me Geo Cruikshank*.
28. The definitive large version was exhibited in Pall Mall in 1817. H. Von Erffa and A. Staley *The paintings of Benjamin West* (New Haven and London, 1986), p.388, No. 401, illus. pp.148-9. An earlier version (No. 403) had been engraved in 1807. Carey in 1817 compared West's composition with Dürer's.
29. *B M Cat*, No. 13266. Reid op.cit., No.915.
30. *The mask of anarchy* (1819), stanza VIII. George in *B M Cat* introduction to Vol.X 1820-1827, p.xv and n.1 cites evidence that Shelley saw and was influenced by English satirical prints in Italy.
31. *B M Cat*, No. 13257; Reid op.cit. No. 905; George op.cit. (1959), pp.182-3; Wardroper op.cit. p.77. See *Black Dwarf*, 14 July 1819.
32. *B M Cat*, Nos. 8426, 13275. The former is illustrated in Dickinson op.cit. p.156.
33. *B M Cat*, No. 13264.
34. *Manchester Observer* 17 July, 31 July, 7 Aug. 1819.
35. *Ibid.*, 26 June 1819. Compare J.P. Kay-Shuttleworth, *The moral and physical condition of the working classes employed in the cotton manufacture in Manchester* (London, 1832), pp.11, 42. L.S. Marshall *The development of public opinion in Manchester 1780-1820* (Syracuse, 1946), p.162; E.P. Thompson *The making of the English working class* (Harmondsworth, 1968), pp.452-6; R. Glen *Urban workers in the early industrial revolution* (London, Canberra and New York, 1984), especially pp.206, 231-2.
36. *The Times* 19 Aug. 1819.
37. *B M Cat*, No. 13263. Mrs Linnaeus Banks op.cit., pp.477-8 believed the figures were accurate portraits, and claimed identification of the clerical magistrate. See also J.H. Wiener *Radicalism and free thought in nineteenth-century Britain: the life of Richard Carlile* (Westport, Connecticut and London, 1983), p.42. Carlile believed the decision to proceed with his prosecution was due to his violent comments on Peterloo.
38. T.C. Campbell (Carlile's daughter), *The battle of the press, as told in the story of the life of Richard Carlile* (London, 1899), pp.22-23. Carlile also (p.311) described a woman, holding an infant who was "sabred over the head" and another stabbed in the neck, both as shown in the print. Compare the "Vindication of female political interference" in *Republican* 10 Sep. 1819. For Carlile's feminist views see Thompson op.cit., p.453; McCalman op.cit., pp.186, 190-3, 213, 216.
39. Bamford op.cit., Vol.II, p.210; McCalman op.cit. p.135, quoting reports to the Home Office.
40. *B M Cat*, No. 13267; Reid op.cit. No.910.
41. *B M Cat*, No. 13281. Reid op.cit. No.926; George op.cit. (1959), p.182; J. Miller *Religion in the popular prints 1600-1832* (Cambridge, 1986), pp.46-8, 284. Close to "the clerical magistrate" at the end of Hone's *The political house that Jack built*. The words attributed to the parson ("Some of these Reformers will come to the Gallows. I see the Rope already round their necks . . .") refer to a widely-reported outburst by Ethelston: *Republican* 1 Oct. 1819, *Black Dwarf* 13 Oct.
42. *B M Cat*, No. 13504. Frontispiece to *The free-born Englishman deprived of his seven senses by the operation of the six new Acts of the boroughmongers. A poem by Geoffrey Gag-'em-all*; (Jan. 1820). This contains many references to Peterloo.
43. *B M Cat*, Nos. 13292-13304; George op.cit. (1959), pp.185-6; E. Rickword *Ed. Radical squibs and loyal ripostes* (Bath, 1971), pp.23-4, 35-58; Wardroper op.cit., pp.84-5. For the background, see J. Routledge, *Chapters in the history of popular progress, chiefly in relation to the freedom of the press . . . 1660-1820* (1876), pp.463, 481 and F.W. Hackwood *William Hone, his life and times* (1912), pp.104, 191-6, 219-220. Louis James in "Cruikshank and early Victorian caricature", *History Workshop* No.6 (1978), pp.111-2, describes the pamphlet as "crude and poorly executed"; but this judgement does not hold in comparison with contemporary working class chapbooks and ballads, and it could equally be seen as representing Hone's uneasy position between the gutter press and the world of respectable publishing. See J. Ann Hone "William Hone, publisher and bookseller: an approach to early 19th century London radicalism", in *Historical Studies* (University of Melbourne), Vol.16, No.62, 1974, pp.62-3, 68.
44. *B M Cat*, No. 13531 f.
45. "An essay on the genius of George Cruikshank" in *Westminster Review* LXVI (1840).
46. Routledge op.cit., p.475; Hackwood op.cit., p.224; James op.cit. at note 3, illus. p.73.