

THE RISE AND FALL OF MANCHESTER'S "SET OF INFERNAL MISCREANTS": RADICALISM IN 1790s MANCHESTER

Craig Horner

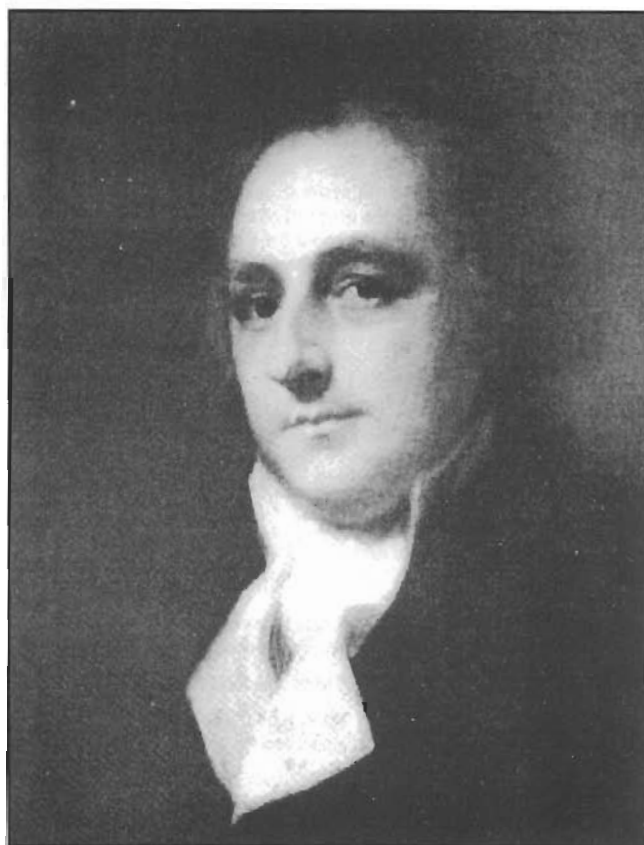
On the evening of 11 December 1792, Thomas Walker Esquire was alarmed to see a mob descending on his Manchester house. It was an ugly situation, defused only by Walker's firing of a pistol warning shot. Walker was a respectable merchant, of considerable wealth and influence in Manchester, yet, curiously, the town's deputy constable Richard Unite, present in the crowd, merely stood back and watched. It is the reasons for his reluctance to intervene that concern us.

Walker's inability to command the long arm of the law was a recent development, and stemmed largely from his being a political "radical". Political controversy, though, was nothing new in Manchester, and had divided the people of Manchester before. Take, for example, the 'Workhouse Issue', between 1729 and 1731. Then, the building of a workhouse was abandoned largely through the chicanery of the 'High Church' Tory party, who realised the administration of the workhouse would leave the party outvoted by a coalition of Dissenters and 'Low Church' Whigs.¹ And, as Manchester grew rapidly in size during the eighteenth century, political manoeuvrings were to remain at the heart of its development.

Walker's radicalism of the first half of the 1790s represented no less a controversy, with a similar shuffling to take sides. Radical goals included religious toleration (for non-conformists, if not Roman Catholics), and parliamentary reform, including universal male suffrage. With the conspicuous exception of his republicanism, radicals had embraced the manifesto of the writer Thomas Paine, a national figure and scourge of the establishment, who also advocated lower taxes and improved trade.

Why this should be controversial stems in part from the disparate nature of the 'middle class' in Manchester. Radicalism certainly had broad appeal, and in Manchester, as elsewhere, attracted support from all social ranks. Yet, the driving force behind it locally were the manufacturing and merchant classes, all undoubted members of the local 'middle class'. Recent research has shown that defining the composition of the late-eighteenth-century middle class presents some difficulties. Barry and Brooks acknowledge the frustration in establishing usable definitions. Smail, while recognising the emergence of a 'social middle' in the course of the eighteenth century, finds it too disparate to be called a 'middle class', and Wahrman observed how the "occupational or socio-economic categories fail time and again to explain satisfactorily patterns of behaviour [...] of the middling sorts".²

But the key problem was not so much how to define a middle class, but to identify the disunity of the class. Davidoff and Hall describe the middle class in the eighteenth century as splintered by religion, politics, and economics, a definition which appears neatly to fit Manchester's model, certainly at the time when Walker was unlocking his pistol. As he was aware, violent opposition to radicalism came just as much



Thomas Walker (1749-1817) Manchester businessman and boroughreeve

from some manufacturers and merchants, including some dissenters, for whose rights radicalism appeared to be fighting.³

But all this middling-rank disunity was changing. The 1790s was the decade when the 'language' of the middle classes assumed, for Wahrman, a "highly-loaded political position". Davidoff and Hall notes how the "excesses in France" caused the radicals of the middling ranks to fear for their property, while the Paineite doctrines became more the province of the artisan communities.⁴ Those middle-class radicals who had so recently championed the French Revolution now found themselves caught in a wave of patriotic fervour which, as shall be apparent, challenged head-on their values. Deputy Constable Unite thus saw every reason smugly to observe events outside Mr Walker's house, rather than intervene.

The Radicals: A "Set of Infernal Miscreants"

Radical agitation, to achieve its aims, manifested itself in two strands. The first was through respectable middling-class organisation, and the second, through popular artisanal organisation, sponsored to a large degree by the former. The

involvement of the populace was a vital feature of radicalism, indicative of a middle class basing itself not on economic terms, but on "seemingly universal Enlightenment values", which included the rights of the people.⁵

Radical debate in 1790s Manchester was led by "friends of liberty", with two local exemplars of particular interest: Thomas Cooper (1759-1839) and Thomas Walker (1749-1817). Cooper was a Unitarian lawyer and medical doctor, and sufficiently financially secure to offer his legal and medical services for free to poor clients.⁶ There is little doubt that he was known throughout Manchester in the 1790s; he had already been immortalised in a satirical broadside of 1790 as "the little Presbyterian Lawyer, with his *Sterling Abilities*". A fiery intellectual, he was also known for his pamphlets on the slave trade, parliamentary reform, and on the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, legislation which prevented dissenters from holding crown or municipal office.⁷

Equally vocal was Walker. An Anglican cotton merchant, he was fêted by the local textile entrepreneurs in the 1780s when he took on, and beat, Prime Minister Pitt, over the latter's "fustian tax". This was an excise duty imposed on dyed stuffs of cotton or mixed cotton and linen, and was particularly repugnant in the locality with its wide powers of inspection, and heavy penalties (including death) for infringement or obstruction. By 1790, Walker was the boroughreeve, an important quasi-mayoral post.⁸ Outspoken, confident, and probably guilty of self-aggrandisement, he was both admired and loathed throughout the town thereafter. For example, an abrasive handbill attacking Walker written by William Roberts in 1790 led to a public and popular libel action (which Walker eventually won), and another satirical broadside of the same year, *The Bull's Head Race*, left no doubt as to its subject:

*Says W----- [Walker] to C----- [Cooper], I've made a
long Speech,
'Bout Jennies, Sir Richard, your new fancied Bleach;
The Fustian Tax next, I'll bring on if I can,
And enlarge on the worth of the People's own Man
Derry down, &c.*⁹

Walker and Cooper represented the new entrepreneurial class of Manchester, and were to enjoy enormous controversy as the local torchbearers of the 1790s radical movement. This was exemplified by their short-lived success in publishing their own radical newspaper, the *Manchester Herald*, which appeared every Saturday between 31 March 1792 and 23 March 1793.

As editor of the *Manchester Herald*, Cooper's vision was of a newspaper that "will at first be gently but always decidedly democratish, nor pestered with much presbyterian nonsense".¹⁰ As a Presbyterian himself, this was indicative of Cooper's shrewd feel for the public interest: there were many column-inches to be written about religious reform, especially in a town of dissenting manufacturers, but Cooper recognised that the *Manchester Herald* had to have wider appeal, and address other related reform issues, in particular parliamentary reform. He saw the *Manchester Herald* as restoring a balance, countering Joseph Harrop's reactionary *Manchester Mercury*. When Walker remarked that "there is not a more formidable enemy to political error than a newspaper impartially-conducted", he had Harrop very firmly in mind. On the other hand, the third weekly, Charles Wheeler's *Manchester Chronicle* was, Cooper noted, "generally moderate and rather in our [the radicals'] favour".¹¹

A TRUE AND PARTICULAR ACCOUNT, OF
TOM PAINE'S
1793 Journeyman, June

Who was taken on Wednesday Evening last, and committed to the New Bailey, for distributing Hand-bills, containing sentiments tending to inflame the minds, and disturb the Peace and tranquility of Manchester and it's Neighbourhood.

IT is now upwards of a fortnight since hand bills were first distributed, addressed to the unemployed artificers of Manchester, in which are sentiments tending to inflame their minds, and disturb the peace and tranquility of the town. The publisher, who signs himself, a friend to the poor, has taken a method to convince them, that instead of being their friend, he is their greatest enemy; as, by all the art in his power, he wishes to make them dissatisfied with their present circumstances, and to stir them up to riot and confusion; but he will here be disappointed, as the poor have already experienced the conduct of a charitable and well-disposed public, and, we doubt not, have too much gratitude to adhere to any part of such a production. A little time, it is hoped will re-instate them in the comforts of a regular employ.

Altho' many persons have been imprisoned, fined, made to stand in the pillory, and other punishments, for disloyalty to their King and country, yet we have another instance of the depravity of man, in this servant of Tom Paine, who, conscious that he was doing wrong, which he borrowed by the secret method he took in dispersing those infamous bills, yet he continued to do so, till he was taken on Wednesday evening last, when he was detected, and committed to the New Bailey.

This Advocate for Paine, is a Manchester man, and was brought up in the fustian line; but being too fond of politics, rather than his own business, has brought himself into a predicament which he will not easily get loose from; and which may serve as a warning to others not to fall into the like error.

Broadside f1793/4: Condemns the hatter Benjamin Booth (Tom Paine's Journeyman) and Thomas Walker ("who signs himself, a friend to the poor")

In balancing out the opposition, the *Manchester Herald* represented a new breed: one of the first provincial weekly newspapers to be taken seriously. It broke the mould by shunning "articles of fashionable intelligence, [...] too frivolous for us to insert". To reinforce its radical credentials, it was probably the first provincial paper to have a foreign correspondent, carrying "eye-witness" accounts of the French Revolution. Another novelty was its "scrupulously attend[ing] to the required authenticity" of any articles republished from elsewhere. Furthermore, it represented a distinct break with the usual run of provincial papers, in that it was, according to Clare, "probably the first provincial paper to be established for purely political reasons", and was not based on profits and advertisements.¹²

With this in mind, for Cooper to write that "it is our duty, as Editors, to avoid, and not to engage in a Controversy of any kind", suggests his tongue must have been firmly in his cheek. Controversy dogged the *Manchester Herald* for its entire 52-week span, as well it might in a newspaper declaring in its very first edition that "neither fear nor favour shall prevent us from making our publication [...] decidedly the Paper of the People". Cooper contributed scathing articles (some under the pseudonym of "Sydney"), treating sensitive subjects with abandon: the French Revolution, by the early-1790s fast becoming an albatross for the radicals, was the "most glorious" revolution, which "inspires all Europe", while the reigning monarch George III was dismissed as having "neither the power nor the inclination to do wrong". Tackling reaction and

hostility with an unswerving self-confidence, he revelled in generating debate, and published letters and resolutions representing all shades of opinion, including the loyalists'; the result was a circulation which "has for many weeks past constantly and VERY CONSIDERABLY ENCREASED". This was an intelligent, proud newspaper, suffering few fools gladly: one letter, from "an Englishman", went unpublished because whilst the editors agreed with its conclusion, they found the arguments neither "logical nor convincing".¹³

The *Manchester Herald* courted a wide readership. Evidence of genteel middle-class interest is demonstrated by advertisements such as that for a "Grand Miscellaneous Concert", with boxes priced at 3s. But of particular importance is that it also enjoyed an artisan readership, implying both popular interest in parliamentary reform, and high levels of artisanal literacy. For example, the Sick Club of the tailor Simon Snip bought its own copy, and Snip revealed how the *Manchester Herald* was already read by "blacksmiths, butchers, farmers, ploughboys [and] old soldiers". An advertisement for the Manchester Reading Society, founded by Cooper, appealed to those "who cannot conveniently purchase such [useful kinds of books] for themselves" and, with its subscription of 6d per month, engaged popular interest. Coffee houses, too, often provided a reading room, an innovation which obliged inns to follow, and establishing a tradition into the nineteenth century. At 31/2d, though, the *Manchester Herald* was still too expensive for a single purchase for many, and was intended to be read by more than the purchaser. Indeed, it was customary for many, even up to thirty, to read a single copy of such a newspaper, as the thick paper and durable texture of the *Manchester Herald* suggest. In addition, each copy sold widely, probably outselling the *Manchester Chronicle* (at 4750 per week in 1793) and the *Manchester Mercury*. Furthermore, the geographical breadth of circulation was astonishing, with agents as far afield as Ireland, whilst it was "read

with avidity and attention" in Glasgow "and [Glasgow's] neighbouring towns".¹⁴

The *Manchester Herald* acted as a forum for the dissemination of radical literature and ideas. Paine, in particular, was lionised. Broadside regularly sung his praises, for example:

*And now the People all rejoice,
Such tidings heard they never,
They cry aloud with Cheerful Voice,
The Rights of Man FOR EVER!!!¹⁵*

There can be no doubt that in Manchester, Paine was a household name, assisted in this by the efforts of the *Manchester Herald*.¹⁶ Part Two of Paine's *Rights of Man* (1792) was advertised in the *Manchester Herald* for 6d along with another of Paine's titles.¹⁷ Indeed, the titles of his works must also have been vernacular terms, because satire relied on their being known: see the following radical broadside of 1792:

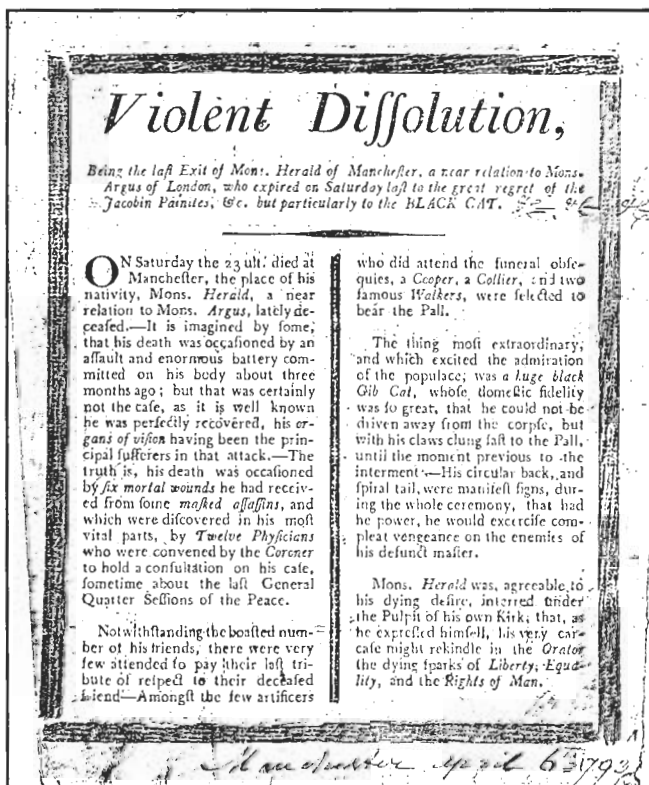
We, the undersigned TORIES, JACOBITES, HIGH-FLIERS and ARISTOCRATS [wish to extirpate] a set of Infernal Miscreants [who use the] weapons of Reason and Common Sense.¹⁸

Whether Paine's ideas were understood by artisanal Mancunians cannot be measured, but the *Manchester Herald* provided a forum to allow for the dissemination of his ideas, even if the analysis was usually positively-charged.

Paine did not have the monopoly in the *Manchester Herald's* columns. Also published were key extracts from contemporary radical texts (including Rousseau, Locke, Hume, Voltaire, and Walker's schoolmaster James Burgh, the "instructor of my [Walker's] youth"¹⁹), reflecting their broad intellectual appeal. The result was a widening of the potential artisanal reading base. For example, extracts published in the *Manchester Herald* included Cooper's own *Reply to [Burke's] Invective*, which was rated, if a little subjectively, "a performance of uncommon ability". Even at 2s, 6000 were sold.²⁰ Extracts from other works were published too, bringing otherwise-expensive works within the reach of the impoverished.²¹ This is evident with the Manchester writer Philips' *The Necessity of a Speedy and Effectual Reform in Parliament*, which was advertised in pamphlet form for an expensive 1/6, and which must have been familiar to artisanal readers because the title was worked into the resolutions of some societies at the time. This pamphlet outlined eight demands relating to parliamentary reform which anticipate Chartism forty years hence. Furthermore, with Burke and Pitt pitched against reform in the 1790s, speeches from their early careers preaching the message of reform and "universal representation" were reproduced with some smugness.²² Their change of camp generated much satire, typically *The Reform* by "the Right Hon. William Pitt":

*The Gentleman Say,
They Remember the Day,
When I was an advocate warm,
For Equalisation,
of Representation
And Cry'd out aloud for REFORM*

*At some other season,
It might be a reason,
Though at present it is not the case;
I am Minister Prime,*



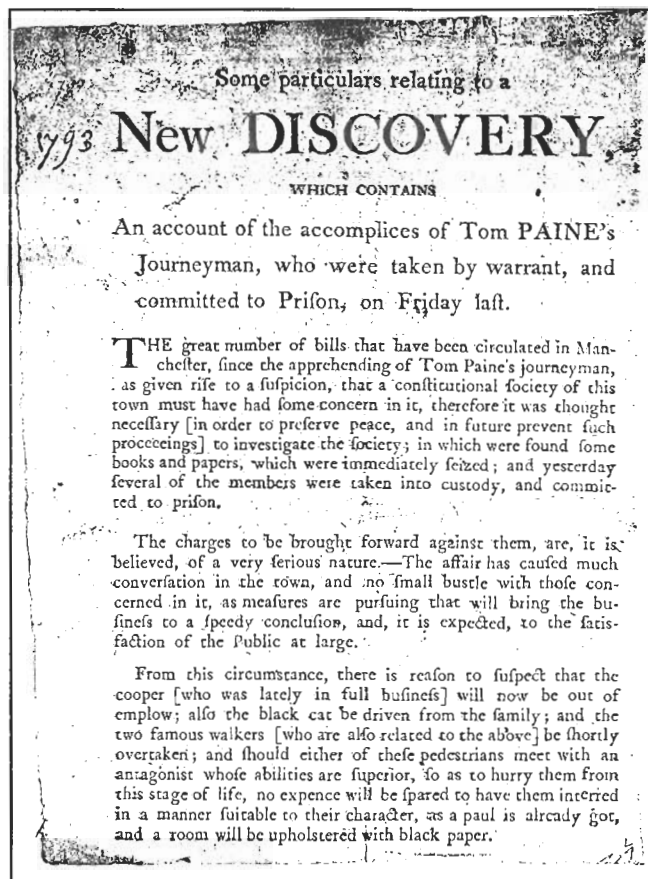
Broadside f1793/16: The death of a newspaper. Published shortly after the demise of the radical *Manchester Herald*

And 'twill never be time,
So Long as I keep in my place.²³

In addition to its own radical press, the Manchester reform movement sought a legitimacy by organising into a series of societies, appealing to all ranks. This was following a trend: by the mid-1790s, there were over one hundred societies in England and Wales.²⁴ In Manchester, middling-class representation came largely through the Manchester Constitutional Society (hereafter, MCS), formed by Cooper and Walker in October 1790. Created "to oppose the intolerant and slavish doctrines which were daily instilled into the people", it recognised that "the people of Great Britain are not fully, fairly and adequately represented in parliament; and the defective state of the representation of this country ... requires a speedy and effectual reform".²⁵ Just as the *Manchester Herald* had been created to restore a balance, the MCS was formed to counter the Church and King club, itself created in March 1790 in a fit of acrimony following a spate of disruptive public meetings concerning the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts. However, as with the *Manchester Herald*, the MCS lurched from one crisis to another, and always remained sufficiently insecure to feel obliged regularly to restate its aims, and emphasise its moderation, doing so usually in broadside form and in its mouthpiece, the *Manchester Herald*.²⁶

Unlike the London Corresponding Society, with its subscription of a penny per week, the MCS remained unashamedly "a gentleman's society"; its joining fee of half a guinea seeing to that. At its peak, the MCS numbered up to one hundred members, all either related to each other, or connected through business. As a respectable society, it was not dissimilar to the London-based Society for Constitutional Information, of which both Cooper and Walker were members.²⁷ However, it stood up for the rights of the unrepresented poor, and in doing so, reinforced its role as an agent of conflict. Furthermore, a link between the MCS and the artisan community was much in evidence. For example, a broadside of June 1793 condemned "Tom Paine's Journeyman", a "Manchester man [...] brought up in the fustian line". This was the hatter Benjamin Booth, who as the broadside reveals, had been recently committed to the New Bailey for distributing handbills "in which are sentiments tending to inflame their [unemployed artisans'] minds". The message, it concluded, was that he could only have accomplished this with the help of a "constitutional society" [the MCS], a "cooper" [Thomas], a "black cat" [Samuel Jackson, secretary of the MCS], and "two walkers" [Thomas and his brother]. Clearly, Paine had become a by-word for conflict and tension, causing this Journeyman to become, as the broadside warned, "too fond of politicks, rather than his own business".²⁸

Societies were also created to represent the populace, and these assumed two distinct forms, the timid and the reckless. The principal exemplars of the former were the Manchester Reformation Society (hereafter, MRS), of which Benjamin Booth was a member, and the Manchester Patriotic Society (hereafter, MPS), both formed in the summer of 1792. They enjoyed the patronage of wealthy entrepreneurs such as Walker, and as such, had little scope to develop their own agendas. Walker clearly considered all three societies (MCS, MPS, MRS) as speaking with one voice, and when the societies were banished from public houses later that year, they continued to meet at his house. Both the MRS and MPS were artisanal: the MRS was composed of "manufacturers, mechanics and labourers", while the MPS sought support from



Broadside f1793/5: Radicals on the run. Mocking the anticipated fate of the members of the Manchester Constitutional Society

the "middle and lower classes" who "have been kept in the dark, with respect to the abuses of government". Therein lay the link with the MCS: both were dedicated to parliamentary reform, and to this "single point are the efforts of the Manchester societies directed". This is clarified in their resolutions, the MPS seeking "by *constitutional means*, a fair and adequate representation in parliament [for the people]", while for the MRS, the "principle [*sic*] intention" was "an effectual reform".²⁹

The use of names such as "Patriotic" or "Constitutional" in the names of the radical societies lay, as Thompson pointed out, in the radical rhetoric which harked back to a mythical Saxon precedent, where commoners enjoyed a constitutional monarchy and free parliament. However, the rhetoric of the mobs was also constitutional. Their precedent, though, extended no further back than the Glorious Revolution. "Church and King" rioters talked of "patriotism" and "birthrights", only because they had been "taught for so long" that following the 1688 Revolutionary settlement, "Constitution" equalled "Liberty". Their "rhetoric of liberty" came to mean patriotism, nationalism, and religious freedom (as long as it did not extend to the Papists). The mob descending on Walker's house on that fateful night, then, believed themselves to be "free-born Englishmen", just as they should defend their Revolutionary constitution from "alien elements", especially Tom Paine, and disciples of his, such as Walker.³⁰

There can be little doubt about Manchester's radical importance, which may be gauged by the number of copies of *Rights of Man* sent out by the London Corresponding Society (hereafter, LCS) to the provincial societies: Sheffield, undisputedly a centre of radicalism, and Manchester (presumably

the MCS) each received 1200.³¹ Yet neither of the two major popular societies in Manchester, the MRS or the MPS, ever enjoyed the success of, for example, Sheffield's Society for Constitutional Information (boasting a membership of "nearly Two Thousand"), and both of the Manchester societies displayed many signs of impotence and dependency. For example, the MRS chose not to press charges when one of their members was falsely imprisoned for cursing the king, and both societies, as Brown noted, were "founded with programmes like that of the parent society [the MCS]. They were strictly moderate and easily frightened". The rapid turnover of honorary officers in both societies merely underlines this, as did their keenness to broadcast a message of their integrity: "Reformation, and not Revolution, is our object", stated an MPS resolution, whilst the MRS rapidly renounced all "riots and tumults".³²

On the other hand, there were other local popular societies less inclined to be meek. The Stockport-based Friends of Universal Peace and Rights of Man (hereafter, FUPROM) consisted of "yeomanry, farmers, manufacturers, mechanics and labourers", as well as "servants in some of the cotton factories". Its resolutions in the *Manchester Herald* sought, *inter alia*, a "speedy and effectual reform", freedom of the press, while religion was considered a "private right of the mind", and wars "the height of wickedness and barbarity". The society gallantly defended itself in a war of words conducted in the pages of the *Manchester Herald* between the reactionary Mr Holland Watson, clerk to Stockport's rector-magistrate, and Tyrtæus, a sympathetic correspondent. Watson tried to denigrate the status of the attendees of FUPROM, describing Hibbert, its president, as an "illiterate, idle fellow". Tyrtæus retorted that because the President is "needy and illiterate ... does not at all invalidate what they say". Defending Hibbert against the charge of idleness, Tyrtæus "blush[es] to mention so vile a slander", declaring he (Hibbert) had read "either more, or to more purpose, than H.W. himself".³³ However, there is some difficulty in establishing the longevity of such societies, some of which may have lasted little longer than the editions in which they advertised their resolutions.

The Reaction: Preserving "Liberty, Order and Property"

Despite having such sophisticated methods to tackle, the Manchester loyalists were more than able in containing the radical threat. Robert Newton, a Stockport attorney, noted in December 1792 that since George III's Proclamation against "seditious writings", the Stockport Jacobins had "changed their tune and have dwindled to nothing, and I fancy we shall hear no more of them". Yet, royal proclamations, representing the first stirrings of nationally-organised repression, served merely as catalysts for local reaction. The appearance of the LCS, and of Part Two of Paine's *Rights of Man*, along with rumours of a London insurrection, all charged the atmosphere.³⁴ Reaction in Manchester, then, was inevitable, and was apparent at two levels: firstly, the use of overt organisations, conforming to the standard contemporary model of meetings and the publication of resolutions, and secondly, the use of intimidation and spies.

Loyalist associations sprang up all over the country. There were as many as thirty in Manchester and its hinterland, and their usual strategy was to seal off every potential avenue of political information. The principal Manchester organisation was the Church and King Club.³⁵ Initially little more than a

dining club, it met annually to celebrate the defeat of the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, and adopted the slogan "Church and King, and down with the Rump", harking back to both the perfect settlement of 1688, and the horrors of the regicide that preceded it.³⁶ Notably, it did not refer to the revolutionary activity just over the English Channel, although the radicals were called by the pejorative "English Jacobins" in the press. Composed of leading Manchester magistrates and churchmen, the loyalists commanded access to the judicial system and the pulpit, and by 1792 enjoyed the support of the boroughreeve too.³⁷

Yet, with such resources at their disposal, their methods were decidedly underhand. The use of spies was typical of this. This was a known tactic, and was popularly mocked, for example by Tom Thorne, following the first Royal Proclamation, in the following broadside:

*To give true happiness to any Nation,
The only method is a PROCLAMATION.
To make a people quiet, good and wise,
The only method is - A GANG OF SPIES.*³⁸

Correspondence was intercepted and opened too. This was, according to Walker, writing to Watt in December 1792, a "general practice".³⁹

The very influence and success of the *Manchester Herald* gave reason for it to be feared. A triumphant broadside produced the week after its demise in 1793 suggests as much. Entitled *Violent Dissolution*, it appeared in the form of an obituary,

*Being the last Exit of Mons. Herald of Manchester [...], who expired ... to the great regret of the Jacobin Painites, &c. [...] Amongst the few artificers who did attend the funeral obsequies, a Cooper, a Collier, and two famous Walkers, were selected to bear the Pall. [...] Mons. Herald was, agreeable to his dying desire, interred under the Pulpit of his own Kirk, that, as he expressed himself, his very carcase might rekindle in the Orator the dying sparks of Liberty, Equality, and the Rights of Man.*⁴⁰

Such gloating was the culmination of much intimidation. Simon Snip wrote about one of his best customers ("a great Aristocrat"), who saw him (Snip) reading the *Manchester Herald*, and remarked that the "publishers and readers of that infernal paper deserve to be hanged". He advised Snip that he would lose his custom if he bought another copy. Yet, ironically, it was the reactionary press that created the demand for the *Manchester Herald*, when Harrop and eventually Wheeler refused to publish Walker's material, because they considered it too contentious: only then was Cooper forced to consider publishing his own newspaper.⁴¹ Furthermore, Harrop, "violently devoted to the High Church Party", printed and distributed free material promoting loyalist propaganda, and was pro-active in printing law-enforcing broadsides.⁴²

The intimidation was undoubtedly effective. Within four years, Walker was on trial for sedition, having been ostracised, his reputation blackened, and his business crippled. "Everything now seemed to wear the appearance of a pre-concerted scheme", remarked Walker, and he was probably right. Graphically illustrating the intense anti-reform feeling of the time, he referred to a handbill which incited riot at the MCS annual dinner:

*If Englishmen had the spirit they used to have, they would, on the 14th of July [1792], pull the house the reformers assembled at, over their heads; and the brains of every man who dined there would be much improved by being mingled with brick and mortar.*⁴³

The printers of the *Manchester Herald*, Falkner and Birch, had, by March 1793, fled to the American colonies, preferring "a voluntary exile to imprisonment": the closure of the *Manchester Herald* swiftly followed. Cooper joined them the following year (moving into, amongst others, the slave-trading business). Clearly, intimidatory loyalist methods worked, even with household names such as Falkner (who, too, featured in the *Bull's-Head Race* broadside) and Cooper.⁴⁴ The fate of the less-visible radical artisans is largely unrecorded, although a (very) young and then unknown Samuel Bamford recollected the experiences of his father's circle, a "small band ... of readers and enquirers after Truth", including a druggist-cum-apothecary, a weaver-cum-herb-doctor, and weavers. In 1792, one of their number, the shoemaker Samuel Ogdon, was dragged from his house by "ruffians", and had his windows and furniture smashed, for being a "Painite".⁴⁵

The Case of the 186 Inn-keepers

Yet, as an example of covert intimidation, the issue of the "186 Inn-keepers" is the most extraordinary. Inn-keepers had provided a valuable rôle for the artisan reformers by taking newspapers, including the *Manchester Herald*. In September 1792, 186 Manchester inn-keepers collectively published a notice:

*[we inn-keepers are] justly alarmed at the treasonable and seditious Conduct of a well-known set of daring MISCREANTS. [...] [We declare] we will not suffer any Meeting to be held in our Houses, of any CLUB OR SOCIETIES ... who have a tendency to put in force what those INFERNALS so ardently and devoutly wish for, namely, the DESTRUCTION OF THIS COUNTRY.*⁴⁶

The advertisement was also prominently placed as the first item on page one of the *Manchester Mercury* of 18 September. This was unusual: local news did not usually start until the third page. It re-appeared the following week signed by even more inn-keepers, along with a similarly-worded advertisement signed by their Bolton colleagues. But this was no independent act, nor demonstration of loyalty on their part. Prior to the advertisement appearing, a "tax-gatherer, accompanied by several persons employed by the clergy" had paid them a visit to warn them about their licences. By their subsequent advertisement, they may have been securing the custom of "the most bigoted and most thirsty", but, more importantly for themselves, they were, at least, still securing custom.⁴⁷ Indeed, it is feasible that the notice was effectively a disclaimer, whereby less visible radical meetings, including those in the guise of tramping trades-society gatherings, could continue to take place.⁴⁸ Furthermore, whether 186 public-houses constituted a significant majority of meeting-places is difficult to quantify, but it probably did not. In any event, it could have been worse: a reported 680 publicans signed up in a similar stunt in Bristol!⁴⁹

What set the incident apart was the debate it generated, suggesting its language must have been vernacular. For example, "Greybeard", an "old man" who had "troubled [his] head very little with politics", was nevertheless sufficiently incensed by the

inn-keepers' advertisement to write to the editor. He disapproved of the inn-keepers' being "dictators of public opinions", and recognised that intimidation must have played some part in persuading them, because he castigated the "Petty Tyrants who instigated the Publicans to this paltry attempt to murder knowledge". It is a touching letter, if suspiciously well-argued for one who, on his own admission, had "not used [his pen] for anything but bare signatures these ten years". The inn-keepers also solicited other indignant responses, too, such as that of Marmaduke Meanwell, who wrote "I always thought ... they [publicans] had no kind of right to presume on dictating on their customers what opinions they should hold in politics". They now, he continued, "serve very well to laugh at". A satirical broadside appeared, condemning the "Tories, Jacobites, High-Flyers and Aristocrats" who wished to extirpate the "infernal miscreants" (i.e., referring to the inn-keepers' notice), but more sinisterly, mentioning "bludgeon men". The language even permeated the resolutions of the boroughreeve's meeting in December 1792, which refused to tolerate any longer the "daring and seditious men".⁵⁰

The effect of the intimidation was not so simple. On the one hand, it caused the withdrawal from the debate of all but the dedicated. For example, a "Churchman, and a plain man", who saw through Burke's "bombast" and "lies", was not prepared to involve himself further, fearing being branded "an infernal miscreant". On the other hand, societies simply became less public. For example, Walker allowed the MCS and its artisan counterparts to meet at his "house and warehouse" until June 1793 "at which time commenced the proceedings against the Members of these Societies". Indeed, there is even evidence that inn-keepers were under pressure from the radicals. John Andrew, Secretary of the Stockport-based FUPROM, noted a practice, that, if the constables should ever discover when a [radical] meeting took place, "they [the radicals] will, (to use their own language), 'blow them [the inn-keepers] up'".⁵¹

The climax of the loyalist backlash was the formation of the Association for Preserving Constitutional Order [...] against [...] Levellers and Republicans (hereafter, APCO), in December 1792. Its published agenda was clear:

... by every legal measure, [to] endeavour to discover and bring to Justice, the Authors, Publishers and Distributors of all Seditious and Treasonable Writings, and especially all persons who shall be engaged in any Societies or Combinations for the dispersion and promotion of such Doctrines.⁵²

Yet if Walker knew its potential, he remained ignorant of its menacing (and unstated) drive. APCO's "Committee of Papers" was formed to gather intelligence, and to this end, offered a reward of ten guineas to tempt informers. It was this Committee which referred the *Manchester Herald* to the Attorney General in January 1793, leading to the newspaper's demise, and which forbade attorneys to defend any accused radicals. Participants in the Association signed declarations of secrecy, and drew up a list which identified 34 individuals (on which list Walker featured) for possible prosecution.⁵³ It applied pressure on senior Mancunians to conform to its agenda, by, for example, printing and placing prominently its resolutions, with signatures, and "inviting" more to sign and be added to the list: some 122 signatures appeared on the petition to form APCO. A similar tactic was adopted in 1795, to name merchants who opposed legislation that was to become the repressive "Two Acts".⁵⁴

Other satellite societies quickly mushroomed, for example, the Society for Supporting Constitutional Energy against Levelling and Republican Principals, based in Ardwick and Chorlton Row, which pledged to co-operate with the "Bull's-Head Association" (i.e., APCO). The Association even engaged in an ideological battle, in that, despite its partiality for Anglicanism, it welcomed the "Catholic Inhabitants" for their declaration of loyalty.⁵⁵

The Demise of Manchester Radicalism

The results effectively submerged the radical movement. Cooper's Manchester Reading Society hastily denied reports "insinuating that it was instituted for the purpose of circulating party publications", and lest that still left doubt as to its function, it followed that by announcing that "political debate is wholly prohibited in the Library Room". The loyalists scented blood, and published two broadsides, both of June 1793: the first, *Tom Paine's Journeyman*, while scoffing at the arrest of the hatter Booth, noted that he had been distributing Paineite handbills published by one "who signs himself, a friend of the poor". This referred directly to Walker, who famously had asked "Is it a crime to glory in the Title of being a Friend of the POOR?", in his address to the inhabitants of Manchester following the attack on his house the preceding December.⁵⁶ The second broadside, *New Discovery*, acted as a post-script to the first, describing how a "constitutional society of this town" (the MCS) must have had a hand in the great number of handbills circulated since "the apprehending of Tom Paine's Journeyman [Booth]". It ends on a sinister note:

*No expense will be spared to have them interred in a manner suitable to their character, as a paul is already got, and a room will be upholstered with black paper.*⁵⁷

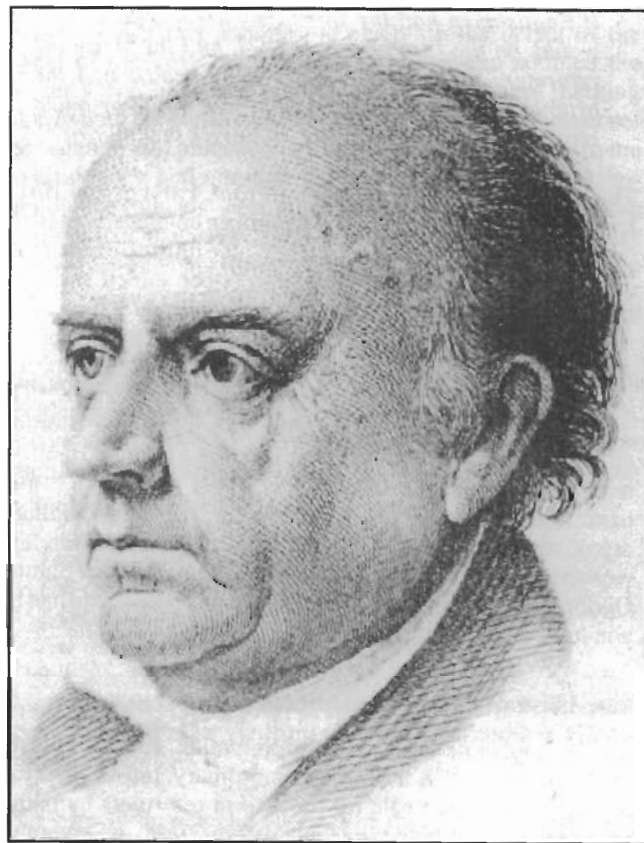
The "paul" was the paper-stainer, member of the MRS and president of the MCS, William Paul, already in custody.⁵⁸

Pressure was applied to dissenting businessmen to withdraw support for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, and consequently, from radical politics, through implicit threats to livelihoods. The eventual consequence was a pragmatic back-tracking by the dissenting community, now especially careful to stress their respectability. For example, one broadside, whilst offering reasons why the Test and Corporation Acts were "useless", urged "that you may not be hastily led ... by a *turbulent and misguided zeal*", and took care to print boldly "God bless the KING, and the House of Hanover, and prosper our GLORIOUS CONSTITUTION".⁵⁹

By the time of the publication of *Rights of Man*, and the mob's visiting Walker in the small hours that fateful day in December 1792, Walker recognised, with disappointment, that he no longer had support from the dissenters:

*Lately, through fear, or some other motive, they [the dissenters] have been so strongly the advocates of an overstrained moderation, that they have rather been the enemies than the friends of those who have ventured the most, and effected the most, for the rights of the people.*⁶⁰

The *Rights of Man*, as Thompson has since noted, proved too much for many to stomach: the dissenters' enthusiasm for civil liberty "melted away" with the title's appearance.⁶¹



Thomas Cooper (1759-1839) lawyer, doctor, pamphleteer and editor

Republicanism, too, had become a goal too far. The French Revolution had enjoyed widespread support in England: Walker had written that "we saw, as we thought, the most perfect, and yet the most peaceful revolution to be found in the history of mankind".⁶² But now, the appearance of the republican *Rights of Man* confirmed the fears of the loyalists for whom 1688 marked the start of a constitutional monarchy which could hardly be improved upon. Suddenly, just as they had seen republicanism emerge in America (along with the loss of the colonies), they now viewed the alarming events in France, and contemplated the possibility at home.

Radicalism in Manchester started to unravel. The middle-class radicals now found themselves uncertain about the rôle of the lower ranks. The reformer Watt believed that the radicals should only appeal to "the thinking and sensible part of the nation", and they should not seek "to tamper with the lower orders of the people". Walker was more ambivalent. On the one hand, he recognised that the mob attacking his house were merely "wretched tools", and it appears that Walker refused protection offered that fateful night because he could not stomach the condition that he dismiss from his house persons who were "very obnoxious to the populace [lower-order members of the MRS]".⁶³ On the other hand, in his later years, he dismissed the rôle of the artisan: [Their] "apathy and timidity", he remarked, "seem .. to be the order of the day".⁶⁴

The radicals were also careful to express their belief in property rights (with which Paine had no problem either).⁶⁵ Mr Egerton, Walker's landlord, had remarked to Walker, "Sir, property is everything to me", and whilst Walker and his propertied peers concurred, opponents of Walker's radicalism made capital of suggesting otherwise.⁶⁶ Damage-limitation exercises were the result. The timid MRS hastily an-

nounced it wanted "Equality of Rights, and not of Property", conceding that "the idea of *Equally* dividing property is absurd and ridiculous". The MPS thanked "those *zealous and true patriots ... who defend property*". Certainly, the stance of societies such as Warrington's Amicable Society for Free Representation and Political Information, which resolved that property was "liable to be invaded", as long as there was no representation, did not reflect broad radical opinion.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the alliance between the middle-class radical and the artisan, coinciding only in 1792-3, was an alliance too far. Thompson noted that "the only alliance strong enough to effect [a revolution] fell apart ... The French Revolution consolidated Old Corruption by uniting landowners and manufacturers in a common panic", and this appears to have been the case in Manchester.⁶⁷ With the middle-class presence removed from the equation, radicalism in Manchester died. The appearance of the Manchester Corresponding Society, "compos'd of mechanics" in February 1796, with 400 members, had no discernible middle-class sponsorship, and English Jacobinism simmered for much of the Napoleonic War as underground labouring-class movements, reappearing, to middle-class disdain, in the post-war depression.⁶⁸ Furthermore, once intellectuals such as Cooper had fled, the movement could not have lasted simply on a diet of *Rights of*

Man. Those middle-class radicals who stayed abandoned their radical rhetoric, as war, taxation and hunger bit hard, and were soon collaborating with their loyalist kin to challenge, for example, war taxation, an issue on which they could more naturally concur. Nationally, middle-class language was 'remobilized' to defend the viability of a political middle position, finding its voice again after Peterloo, with its denunciation of popular radicalism.⁶⁹

There never had been a future for radicalism in 1790s Manchester: events in France proved too powerful to resist. Enjoying the briefest of influences, from 1790 to about 1795, it had relied on an uneasy collaboration of disparate men whose religious, economic and political persuasions were too broad to permit any lasting bond. Its very nature was backward-looking. On the one hand, it looked back to an imaginary time of popular rights, but this was an increasingly-impossible goal in light of events across the Channel. On the other hand, efforts to secure constitutional reform alarmed businessmen in unincorporated Manchester who saw only disadvantages in parliamentary representation, and besides, had not all necessary reforms been instigated after 1688? Consequently, the mob attack on Walker's house was one of the final straws, and within months, the back of the radical community in Manchester was broken. Thomas Walker Esquire may have been alarmed that night, but he could not have been surprised.

NOTES

The Author would like to thank Dr David Nicholls and Dr Tony Adams for reading and commenting on previous drafts of this article.

- ¹ See K. Kondo, 'The Workhouse Issue at Manchester: selected documents 1729-35 (Part One)', *Kenkyu Ronshu*, 33 (1987) [offprint available at Manchester Central Reference Library].
- ² J. Barry and C. Brooks (eds.), *The Middling Sort of People: Culture, Society and Politics in England, 1550-1800* (Basingstoke, 1994), p.12; D. Wahrman, 'National Society, communal culture: an argument about the recent historiography of eighteenth-century Britain', *Social History*, 17 (1992), p.47; J. Smail, *The Origins of Middle-Class Culture: Halifax, Yorkshire, 1660-1780* (Ithaca, 1994), p.13.
- ³ L. Davidoff and C. Hall (eds.), *Family Fortunes: Men and women of the English middle class, 1780-1850* (1987), pp.18-28.
- ⁴ D. Wahrman, *Imagining the Middle Class: The Political Representation of Class in Britain, c1780-1840* (Cambridge, 1995), p.67; Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, p.19.
- ⁵ A. Clark, 'Review of Wahrman, *Imagining*', *Social History*, 21 (1996), p.367.
- ⁶ A. Goodwin, *The Friends of Liberty: the English democratic movement in the age of the French Revolution* (1979), p.13; T. Walker, *A Review of some of the political events which have occurred in Manchester during the last five years, being a sequel to the trial of Thomas Walker, and others, for a conspiracy to overthrow the constitution and government and to aid and assist the French, being the King's enemies* (1794), p.15; J. O. Baylen and N. J. Gossman (eds.), *Biographical Dictionary of Modern British Radicals: Volume 1: 1770-1830* (Sussex, 1979), p.95.
- ⁷ Manchester Central Library: Local Studies Unit Broadside Collection (hereafter Broadside) f1790/13; Baylen and Gossman, *Biographical Dictionary*, p.95.
- ⁸ At the time, Manchester's administrative mechanism remained that based on the medieval manor, retaining for its leadership a quasi-mayoral "boroughreeve", an elected post held by the incumbent for one year. Its jurisdiction remained in the form of the Court Leet, which, by 1788, according to Redford, was "sluggish and inactive": A. Redford, *The History of Local Government in Manchester: Volume 1: Manor and Township* (1939), p.192. Some 136 officers each year were elected to a myriad of posts, including some as diverse as 'Officers for Tasting Wholesome Ale and Beer'. As the posts were unpaid, it was as difficult to recruit officers as it was to get them to perform their duties once recruited: J. P. Earwaker (ed.), *The Court Leet Records of the Manor of Manchester: Volume ix: 1787-1805* (Manchester, 1889), p.vi, *passim*.
- ⁹ See J. Gurney, *The Whole Proceedings of the trial of an indictment against Thomas Walker of Manchester, Merchant, [and others]; for a conspiracy to overthrow the constitution and government and to aid and assist the French, being the King's enemies, in case they should invade the kingdom* (1794); Broadside f1790/1/g.
- ¹⁰ Cooper, in a letter to Horne Tooke, cited in F. Knight, *The Strange Case of Thomas Walker: Ten Years in the life of a Manchester Radical* (1957), p.70.
- ¹¹ Walker, *Review*, p.25; Cooper, cited in Knight, *Strange Case*, p.70.
- ¹² *Manchester Herald*, 31 Mar. 1792; D. Clare, 'The Local Newspaper Press and Local Politics in Manchester and Liverpool 1780-1800', *Transactions of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society*, 73-4, (1963-4), p.112.
- ¹³ *Manchester Herald*, 31 Mar. 1792, 2 June 1792, 28 July 1792, 4 Aug. 1792, 22 Dec. 1792; Walker, *Review*, p.54.
- ¹⁴ *Manchester Herald*, 29 Sep. 1792, 20 Oct. 1792, 24 Nov. 1792; Clare, 'Local Newspaper Press', pp.104-8. See the advertisement for John Doherty's 'Manchester Coffee and News-Room' in the *Manchester and Salford Advertiser*, 2 Mar. 1833.
- ¹⁵ *Manchester Herald*, 1 Dec. 1792. Song to the tune of Chevy Chase.
- ¹⁶ See, for example, *Manchester Herald*, 31 Mar. 1792.
- ¹⁷ *Manchester Herald*, 27 Oct. 1792.
- ¹⁸ (My emphasis) *Manchester Herald*, 25 Sep. 1792 and Broadside f1792/26/b. This is one of many such examples. The term 'Infernal Miscreants' refers to the reformers, and relates to the episode of the '186 Publicans'.
- ¹⁹ Baylen and Gossman, *Biographical Dictionary*, p.507. Walker quoted freely from Burgh's *Political Disquisitions* (e.g., Walker, *Review*, pp.6, 15.).
- ²⁰ *Manchester Herald*, 29 Sep. 1792; Baylen and Gossman, *Biographical Dictionary*, p.95.
- ²¹ Such extracts included Price's *Writings on the Subject of the Finances of this Kingdom* (*Manchester Herald*, 14 July 1792), Volney's *Les Ruines* (*ibid*, 29 Sep. 1792), Smollett's *Present State* (Volume 2, on the "ills of the Constitution") (*ibid*, 16 Feb. 1793), and William Frend's *Peace and Union* (*ibid*, 9 Mar. 1793).

- ²² *Manchester Herald*, 12 Jan. 1793 and *passim*. For Burke's 1780 speech, see, for example, *Manchester Herald*, 2 June 1792.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, 19 May 1792. These are the first and last of six verses.
- ²⁴ J. Stevenson "'Paineites to a Man?'" The English Popular Radical Societies in the 1790s', *Society for the Study of Labour History Bulletin*, 54 (1989), p.15.
- ²⁵ Walker, *Review*, pp.16-7.
- ²⁶ For example, Broadside f1792/3b and *Manchester Herald*, 19 May 1792.
- ²⁷ P. Brown, *The French Revolution in English History* (1965), p.61; Goodwin, *Friends of Liberty*, pp.144,147; E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (1980), p.19; E. Royle and J. Walvin, *English Radicals and Reformers 1760-1848* (1982), p.55.
- ²⁸ Broadside f1793/4 & f1793/5; Knight, *Strange Case*, pp.119-120, 176.
- ²⁹ *Manchester Herald*, 26 May 1792, 8 Dec. 1792, 22 Dec. 1792, 23 Mar. 1793.
- ³⁰ Thompson, *Making*, pp.85, 95-96; J. Keane, *Tom Paine: A Political Life* (1995), p.291.
- ³¹ D. Read, *The English Provinces c1760-1960: A Study in Influence* (1964), p.48; Thompson, *Making*, p.167.
- ³² *Manchester Herald*, 14 Apr. 1792, 2 June 1792, 23 June 1792; Brown, *French Revolution*, p.61.
- ³³ R. Glèn, *Urban Workers in the Early Industrial Revolution* (Beckenham, 1984), p.121; *Manchester Herald*, 1 Sep. 1792, 13 Oct. 1792.
- ³⁴ Glèn, *Urban Workers*, p.125; Wahrman, *Imagining*, pp.39-40.
- ³⁵ A. Booth 'Popular Loyalism and Public Violence in the North-West of England 1790-1800', *Social History*, 8 (1983), p.296; See Broadside f1790/1j; Goodwin, *Friends of Liberty*, p.145 n35.
- ³⁶ Goodwin, *Friends of Liberty*, p.146. See also note 32 above.
- ³⁷ J. A. Caulfield, 'The Reeves Association: A Study of Loyalism in the 1790s', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Reading, 1988, abstract.
- ³⁸ *Manchester Herald*, 30 June 1792.
- ³⁹ Cited in Knight, *Strange Case*, p.153.
- ⁴⁰ Broadside f1793/16. See also Knight, *Strange Case*, pp.118-9.
- ⁴¹ *Manchester Herald*, 20 Oct. 1792. Harrop had declined to print Walker's advertisements since Apr. 1791, but the final straw came when Charles Wheeler, printer of the *Manchester Chronicle*, declined to print a pro-French article in August of that year.
- ⁴² Walker, *Review*, p.25; Broadside f1792/9.
- ⁴³ Walker, *Review*, pp.23, 55; Baylen and Gossman, *Bibliographical Dictionary*, p.507.
- ⁴⁴ Walker, *Review*, p.55; Broadside f1790/1g.
- ⁴⁵ W. H. Chaloner (ed.), *The Autobiography of Samuel Bamford: Volume One: Early Days, Together with and Account of the Arrest, &c* (1967), pp.43-5.
- ⁴⁶ *Manchester Herald*, 22 Sep. 1792.
- ⁴⁷ A. Prentice, *Historical Sketches and Personal Recollections of Manchester intended to illustrate the progress of public opinion from 1792 to 1832* (Manchester, 1851), p.7.
- ⁴⁸ See R. A. Leeson, *Travelling Brothers: The six centuries' Road from Craft Fellowship to Trade Unionism* (1979), p.113. For example, the Society of Journeymen Brush-makers' Rules, published in 1806 prominently pleaded loyalty to the monarch and 'Protestant Succession', probably more through the need to appear to be 'respectable' than through conviction. See S. Lewenhak, *The Early Trade Unions including the Founding of the National Trades Unions* (1966).
- ⁴⁹ *Manchester Herald*, 19 Jan. 1793.
- ⁵⁰ Broadside f1792/5 and f1792/26b; *Manchester Herald*, 22 Sep. 1792, 6 Oct. 1792.
- ⁵¹ Walker, *Review*, p.95; *Manchester Herald*, 3 Nov. 1792; Glèn, *Urban Workers*, p.123.
- ⁵² *Manchester Herald*, 15 Dec. 1792.
- ⁵³ *Ibid.* Prentice, *Historical Sketches*, pp.420-3. See also Knight, *Strange Case*, pp.103, 119.
- ⁵⁴ Broadside f1792/3a, f1795/6b.
- ⁵⁵ *Manchester Herald*, 19 Jan. 1793; Manchester Loyal Association minute book (for 22 Dec. 1792), cited in Knight, *Strange Case*, p.104.
- ⁵⁶ *Manchester Herald*, 15 Dec. 1792, 5 Jan. 1793 and 16 Feb. 1793; Broadside f1793/4.
- ⁵⁷ Broadside f1793/5. See also Walker, *Review*, pp.96-114.
- ⁵⁸ Thompson, *Making*, p.131n.
- ⁵⁹ Broadside f1790/1f.
- ⁶⁰ Walker, *Review*, p.125.
- ⁶¹ Thompson, *Making*, pp.57-8.
- ⁶² Walker, *Review*, p.19.
- ⁶³ James Watt jr., cited in I. Christie, *Stress and Stability in late-eighteenth Century Britain: Reflections on the British Avoidance of Revolution* (Oxford, 1984), p.51; *Manchester Herald*, 19 Jan. 1793; Knight, *Strange Case*, pp.99-100.
- ⁶⁴ Walker to Cartwright, 1804, cited in Knight, *Strange Case*, p.180.
- ⁶⁵ Thompson, *Making*, p.104; Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, p.19.
- ⁶⁶ Walker, *Review*, p.44.
- ⁶⁷ *Manchester Herald*, 13 Oct. 1792, 8 Dec. 1792, 9 Mar. 1793; Thompson, *Making*, pp.195-6.
- ⁶⁸ A. Booth, 'The United Englishmen and Radical Politics in the Industrial North-West of England 1795-1803', *International Review of Social History*, 31 (1986), pp.273-4. See, for example, J. L. Baxter and F. K. Donnelly, 'The Revolutionary "Underground" in the West Riding: Myth or Reality?', *Past and Present*, 64 (1974), pp.124-32.
- ⁶⁹ Thompson, *Making*, pp.195,201. See Wahrman, *Imagining*, pp.108-13, 187-8.